VALLEY OF DISCORD;
THE STRUGGLE FOR POWER IN THE PURITAN CHURCHES OF THE CONNECTICUT VALLEY, 1636-1720

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PREFACE

In 1648 Thomas Hooker's Magnificent A Survey of the Summe of Church Discipline[1] was published in London and began to appear in London Bookstalls. The Survey, often called the "summa" of New England Congregationalism, was the definitive statement on the nature of the "New England Way." Certainly Hooker intended it to be that. Long embroiled in a heated controversy with the Presbyterian Samuel Rutherford, Hooker viewed his Survey as the complete statement on, and defense of, New England Congregationalism, as well as a concise statement of the goals and purposes of the settlers of the New England Canaan.

For Hooker the settlement of New England was the climax of seventeen centuries of Christianity and of the Protestant Reformation as well. The history of Christianity, he argued, was composed of three great ages. The first was the era of the primitive Christian church when all of God's truths were known to man. But that age came to an end and was replaced by twelve centuries of darkness--from the fourth to the sixteenth--when God, because of human wickedness, blinded men to the Truth and caused them to lapse into error. That error, of course, was institutionalized in the Roman Catholic Church. The sixteenth century brought the Protestant Reformation when God again began to reveal his Truth to man. The Protestant, equating the Pope with the Anti-

Christ, sought the purity and simplicity of primitive Christianity and God obliged by revealing it to him.

However, Hooker continued, reformation proved a slow process. God revealed his Truths slowly and imperfect men took even longer to separate truth from human error, but, Hooker asserted joyously, the last stage of reformation had finally arrived. All major questions regarding primitive Christianity had been resolved save two. Of those Hooker addressed himself to the second, the true form of church government, the form in which God had intended Christ's spiritual authority to be institutionalized in the visible church. That question, Hooker went on, was answered in the first decades of the seventeenth century when the form of church government in the primitive church was discerned as congregational. Christ's authority had been invested not in elders, or bishops, or Popes, but in the people.

New England's position in the unfolding drama of reformation was not difficult to determine. For a century, Hooker lamented, Protestant reformers had sought to recreate pure churches amidst the corruption and decadence of Roman Catholic Europe. Each time they had attempted to create truly reformed congregations their efforts were frustrated by the corrupting influence of ancient and sinful institutions. In England reformation had resulted in the unreformed Church of England. In Europe, Protestantism was threatened by the counter-attack of a militant Roman Catholicism. What was needed to save the Reformation from extinction was a land uncluttered and untouched by corrupt European man, a free atmosphere where Protestants could recreate the primitive church without fear of pollution from Europe.

Such a land was revealed to man; a wilderness of immense size and abundant resources. From among many loyal subjects God had chosen a handful to leave Europe and to occupy that wilderness and charged them with the mission of building a Godly commonwealth, a society of saints whose single purpose would be the creation of churches conforming in every way to the doctrine and polity of primitive Christianity. Thus, according to Hooker, the history of Christianity was about to come full circle from the halcyon days of the early church through the darkness of Roman Catholicism and the struggles of the Reformation to the restoration of Christ's church in the wilds of New England. And, he concluded triumphantly, the New England experiment had succeeded. Her churches were pure in doctrine and polity and that polity--the establishment of which had formed the core of New England's mission--was congregational.[2]

But if Hooker's analysis of the mission and growth of the institutional church in New England was accurate then much of what we know of New England Puritanism is inaccurate. Historians have long portrayed the New England Puritan as a rigid authoritarian whose institutions, both civil and ecclesiastical, were highly structured, static, and controlled from the top. Supposedly, ruling power was concentrated in the hands of a few saints whose number did not often exceed the rolls of ministers and magistrates. Conformity to preconceived ideals was the prerequisite for existence in Puritan New England and individual desires were sublimated to the good of the whole. Authority existed largely to keep recalcitrant individuals in line and to keep men's thoughts on the lofty religious ideals which had brought them to that forbidding land.

This picture of seventeenth century New England is contrasted graphically with the "Yankee" society of the eighteenth century. Here the power base was broad, the true locus of power was to be found in the people and not in their leaders. Society was fluid, mobile, acquisitive, and found its source of strength in the good of the individual, not the good of the whole. The authoritarian Puritan had given way to the democratic Yankee and the institutions of the Puritan, which had sought to force the goals of the society on the wills of individuals, had given way to Yankee institutions which were flexible and which were, above all, firmly tied to the needs and desires of the people.[3]

Recent scholarship on seventeenth century Massachusetts has produced a sizable amount of evidence contradicting this portrait of New England society. The penchant for local history and demographic analysis has thrown new light on the nature of early New England. Having grown tired of a narrow brand of intellectual history content to explain the nature of Puritan society only in terms of the stated goals and purposes of the literate few, recent scholarship has sought to do what was heretofore considered unthinkable, to seek new understanding of Puritan New England through an analysis of its institutions. Not surprisingly the results have produced a portrait of a society in which a great gulf existed between stated ideals and social reality. The appeals of a Winthrop or a Cotton, or a Mather, to a society of order, harmony, conformity, and authoritarianism are in sharp contrast to the reality of day to day life in Boston or Sudbury where the goals of man, not God, were pursued, where life was chaotic, not harmonious, where institutions were constantly changing to meet the needs of the people, not the state, where power--whether civil, ecclesiastical, or economic--was not irrevocably consigned to the hands of the few but was broadly based. In a sense, the new synthesis of seventeenth century Massachusetts suggests a society where Puritan and Yankee existed simultaneously.

No such synthesis, however, characterizes our understanding of the other great area of Puritan settlment in the seventeenth century, Connecticut and the Connecticut

Valley. Professor Bushman's recent study bears mute testimony to this fact.[4] Little or nothing is know of the nature of life among those fledgling settlements along the Connecticut River. No attempt has been made to do for Hartford or Windsor what Professors Powell and Rutman have done for Sudbury and Boston.[5] No demobraphic study exists for Connecticut to match Professor Lockridge's study of Dedham.[6] Even the Connecticut ministry has largely escaped the scrutiny of the intellectual historian of Puritanism. Thomas Hooker lacks even a mediocre biography. Samuel Stone is largely unknown. Solomon Stoddard remains an enigma. Only Jonathan Edwards, among all early Valley divines, has received appropriate attention, and studies of Edwards have lacked any real understanding of the institutional development of the society producing him. Our knowledge of seventeenth century Connecticut is based almost entirely on the intellectual historians' assumptions about the nature of Massachusetts gleaned from the writings of the Winthrops, the Cottons, the Mathers, and the Shepards. Connecticut is viewed as but a mirror of Massachusetts; static, highly structured, tranquil, orderly, the true society of the saint in which individual wants were sublimated to the good of the whole. Connecticut is portrayed as the Puritan Holy Commonwealth, a society whose fixed institutions conformed to notions brought from Europe and whose civil and ecclesiastical power was the sole prerogative of an oligarchy of magistrates and ministers.[7]

This study seeks, in a small way, to challenge such assumptions about the nature of society in the Connecticut Valley in the seventeenth century. Its purpose is to analyze the development of one of the Valley's institutions, the church, and to show how and by whom that church was governed. It assumes the fundamental importance of the church to the development of the New England town. It assumes, as well, the importance of understanding the nature of the church's growth as a prerequisite to an understanding of the nature of colonial society. It assumes, above all else, that the desires of church members were a microcosm of the desires of the society and that the thoughts and actions of the clergy and the brethren represented, to a large extent, the thoughts and actions of all the inhabitants. It assumes that the development of one institution reflected the development of all institutions.

The study takes as its starting point Hooker's statement of the nature of the Puritan's errand into the wilderness: the establishment of churches conforming to congregational polity and dedicated to the preservation of the Congregational Way. Its central purpose is the attempt to explain some of the peculiar, and heretofore, largely unexplained events of the Connecticut Valley's ecclesiastical history--events seeming to separate the Valley's ecclesiastical development from that of the neighboring Bay towns. Those events, all related to matters of church government and discipline, contradict Hooker's assertions of Congregational orthodoxy. Those events--the Half-Way Covenant and the church disputes of the 1650's and 1660's, the Synod of 1667, the Toleration Act of 1669, the "jeremiad" psychology of the 1670's and 1680's, Solomon Stoddard's Presbyterianism, and the Saybrook Platform--all seem to suggest that, rather than a bastion of Congregational orthodoxy, the Connecticut Valley was plagued by a continuing struggle between adherents of rival disciplines, between Congregationalists and Presbyterians.

On the surface the development of the institutional church in the Valley appears to have been shaped by an extension of the old debates among English non-conformists. Connecticut, which was intended according to Hooker to be the beacon of the Reformed church, the haven of Congregationalism, became, instead, only an extension of the English battleground of competing disciplines. The "New England Way" with its covenant theology and congregational polity came under fire from Presbyterians among the clergy and the laity. The pure, covenanted, autonomous, congregationally governed church held out as long as it could, then submitted to the onslaughts of Solomon Stoddard and the architects of the Saybrook Platform.

This theory of Connecticut's ecclesiastical development, which conforms to our accepted notions of the rise and fall of the "New England Way" and which seems to conform as well to the chronology of events in Connecticut's ecclesiastical history, has always assumed that Puritan notions of communities of saints and of pure autonomous churches, were ill-suited to life in the wilderness. It has assumed that Puritans like Hooker created institutions conforming to abstract European ideologies only to discover that those institutions could not adapt to the exigencies of wilderness life. In the Connecticut Valley, where it is assumed that the destruction of the "New England way" proceeded more quickly than in Massachusetts, the static Puritan gave way to Yankee individualism largely through the activities of such men as Solomon Stoddard.

But it is the irony of Connecticut Valley history that the essence of a Congregationalist polity--the "power of the fraternity"--developed not because of but in spite of the Hooker's and their _a priori_ notions of New England's mission. For all their paeans to congregational theory the ministers of Hooker's generation, in reality, dominated the fledgling churches along the Connecticut River. They presided over confused and frightened little bands of Englishmen who were thousands of miles from homes they had known and loved. To establish the institutions necessary to perpetuate human society in a land without institutions the people turned to their leaders, both civil and ecclesiastical, for guidance. The clergy responded by accepting the mantle of authority and from their positions of eminence they fashioned the institutional church. In a real sense they became the institutional church. The Hartford church was Thomas Hooker. The Windsor church was John Warham. Congregationalism as a functioning method of church government was a myth in the first generation for the ministers led and the people followed.

The ideal of ecclesiastical orthodoxy among the clergy was also a myth in the early years. They professed to be Congregationalists yet beneath their affirmations lay fundamental differences on questions of church polity; differences they could not or would not resolve. Consequently, in molding the polities of their churches they followed their individual judgments with the result that the Valley's churches, though ostensibly "Congregational," maintained polities reflecting the peculiar notions of the early ministers. Hartford had a church covenant; Windsor did not. New London demanded a public narrative of conversion experience from a prospective member; Wethersfield did not. Examples of such variations were almost endless.

Thus, from the beginning, the churches of the Connecticut Valley revealed a cavernous gulf between publicly stated ideals and actual practices. They professed to be Congregational churches yet the brethren did not rule. They professed ecclesiastical orthodoxy yet there was great diversity in both belief and practice. The situation was ripe for dissension and turmoil yet there was little, at least not at first. But rapid change was inevitable in a society lacking traditional institutional restraints; a society where fledgling institutions--like the churches--were so closely allied with particular personalities. Those men died or merely grew old and their demise, and the ascendancy of younger men, created a momentary power vacuum in the churches. The brethren, now secure in their new homes and confident in their ability to manage their own affairs, seized the opportunity. Spurred on by the ecclesiastical differences among the ministers the brethren made those differences their own and began to argue for or against particular views on baptism, admission, procedures, church councils and a host of other issues, as well as demanding the right to determine the polities of their particular churches. Soon, however, the struggle centered on the latter issue, ministerial power, and, in the 1650's and 1660's, the Connecticut Valley experienced a crisis of authority. Brethren and clergy fought for control of the churches. Townsmen fought clergy and brethren for control of the churches. In some communities townsmen were successful in obtaining at least a modicum of ecclesiastical power. In every town, however, the brethren succeeded in stripping the minister of his authority. Soon the struggle went beyond the confines of the church and began to subvert civil authority as well and neither local selectmen nor colonial magistrates were able to stem the divisions in the towns and the churches. Laws were disregarded and orders went unheeded. The commands of established authority, whether civil or ecclesiastical, were mocked or ignored by colonists bent on having their own way.

All subsequent events in the Connecticut Valley to the Great Awakening were colored by the transfer of power from ministers to people. The jeremiads, the emergence of Solomon Stoddard, the Saybrook Platform, the new evangelicalism, were all aspects of clerical attempts to regain lost authority. The brethren countered by cloaking their newly won power in the sanctity of congregational theory, arguing that the "power of the fraternity" was the essence of the "New England Way." Ultimately, Congregationalism emerged triumphant in the Connecticut Valley, but it was not the Congregationalism of English non-conformity or Thomas Hooker or John Davenport or the Cambridge Platform, it was the Congregationalism of a people bent on controlling their own institutions and shaping those institutions to fit their own needs. The struggle for power was the dominant theme in the ecclesiastical history of the Connecticut

Valley in the seventeenth century and if the modern scholar continues to adhere to the notion that the institutional church played an important role in the development of colonial New England then he must change, accordingly, many of his cherished conceptions about the nature of Puritan society.

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PROLOGUE:

Congregationalists and Presbyterians in the Connecticut Valley.

In 1669 a young Connecticut clergyman, John Woodbridge Jr., wrote a long letter to the famous English divine Richard Baxter.[1] He had not met Baxter but Woodbridge served a church in Killingworth, Connecticut, as remote a settlement as could be found, and suffered from a condition common to many ministers in New England--lack of intellectual stimulation. So, in the fashion of the day, he chose one of the most eminent reformed divines of whom he had heard and composed a letter. He had no assurance that Baxter would answer, but to Woodbridge the important thing was to have an opportunity to express his thoughts and, perhaps, obtain counsel on matters which perplexed him.

Woodbridge began the epistle by apologizing for his presumption in writing to so famous a man but, he complained, "I have so long Conversed with Oakes and Indians that I find my Selfe very much disenabled to manage any due and humble Intercourse."[2] He then proceeded to a discussion of matters troubling him. The brethren and ministers of the Connecticut Valley, he wrote, were hypocrites for they were plagued by a chasm-like gulf between the unity of their proclaimed ideals of church discipline and the disunity of their beliefs and practices. For years they had proclaimed to the world the holiness of their mission, their purity, and their conformity in church discipline. Yet during those same years they had been shaken by dispute and jarred by division--division fomented by unresolved questions of church discipline. "We have great doubts about ourselves," he concluded. "The Scandall of our Rents and divisions being more deeply Accented by our pretences to greater Light and Purity."[3] Woodbridge then described in depth the latest and most violent controversy over discipline in the Valley, one which nearly destroyed the most revered and respected of all Valley churches--First Church of Hartford.

In England, Baxter was obviously intrigued by such a plaintive appeal for guidance from the Connecticut wilderness for the tone of a second Woodbridge letter written a few months later indicated that Baxter had asked for a more lengthy dissertation on the nature of the problems of New England's churches. Woodbridge eagerly obliged and in this second letter painted a portrait of dissension which must have sounded familiar to an English cleric long embroiled in the debates among non-conformists.[4]

Woodbridge gave a brief description of the religious situation in each colony. Rhode Island, he wrote, defied analysis. It was full of "heretics" and among its inhabitants could be found adherents to nearly every view advanced by Protestants since the beginning of the Reformation. Plymouth was quieter but full of Separatists, or "Brownists," and Woodbridge clearly had little use for such people. He had "not heard of any minister or church amongst them as yet that are awakened to open their Church-doors a little wider for those to enter, who are only visibly holy and uncleane because the porters are so strict. Tho in the other colonyes, bless be God Truth and Charity have ground of those errours and false practices that we are reproached for by the world, and we daily heare of Enlargements of the Church."[5]

Woodbridge also was critical of the situation in Massachusetts and did not agree with either the views or practices predominant in that colony. However, his description of Massachusetts was a portrait of a situation something short of tranquility and uniformity. "There are three formes of Disciplinarians [in Massachusetts]," he wrote, "each one step higher than his fellow. Rigid Independents, moderate ones and those that are Presbyterianly addicted, tho their numbers are few, and their hornes kept short. Of the first sort are the gleanings of the Clergy and the Body of the Laity." Many of the ministers, he believed, would have rejected independency long before, but the laity exercised such firm control "that they cannot fly their own course."[6]

According to Woodbridge, the "Rigid Independents" were "large" on two points; that councils had no decisive power and that baptism ought to be restricted to children whose parents were church members having related "a story of their conversion, the manner and steps thereof..." The last mentioned practice was changing, he added, so that in many places people were admitted if their conversion "be first Judged by the Elder and an understanding brother or 2 in private and then approoved by the house of commons in publique." Of course, Presbyterians and moderate Independents held divergent views on each of these questions, he continued. The Presbyterians were particularly opposed to the concept of the power of the brethren--the theory that "Every brother has Equall power in judgment with the pastor"--and eagerly sought a change.[7]

Turning to Connecticut Woodbridge happily asserted that his colony was the farthest from Independence--primarily because divergent opinions were tolerated by law. Of the ministers of churches in the twenty-two Connecticut towns, twelve held views other than rigid Independency, but the freedom of thought which Woodbridge found so refreshing was also, he admitted, the source of much grief. The "Rigid and more unbent congregationalists are the same in Judgment and practice as those in other colonies," he noted, but because of toleration they mercilessly attacked their opponents. The Presbyterians were more "full in their practice" than elsewhere but were equally zealous in attacking their antagonists. The result was a situation bordering on ecclesiastical anarchy. Most of the churches--and the ministry as well--were hopelessly divided over questions of discipline, and the General Assembly seemed powerless to effect a solution.

As to the strength of the Presbyterians--of whom he considered himself a loyal supporter--he mentioned only two towns where "all of the Christian inhabitants are under the care, inspection, and government of the Eldership;" Wethersfield (under Gershom Bulkeley) and his own church. Killingworth, he reported proudly, was the embryo of a fine Presbyterian church. However, he lamented, whether he succeeded or failed seemed not in his own hands but in the hands of neighboring churches where he was universally despised. "Our great neighbors have...refused to joyne with us at the Lords Table and to admit our members occasionally unto their Synaxis."[8] They accused him of admitting the scandalous to membership though "the way I provide in would be accounted the Narrow way in all churches of the world besides our own, and yet tis here Accounted the Broad way."[9]

Woodbridge explained his method of admitting members. Aspirants were expected to indicate their wishes to him, he then relayed their desires to the congregation and asked for the disclosure of any "scandal" which might prevent the applicant from joining. If none was discovered, Woodbridge privately examined the qualifications of the aspirant. "I examine them concerning their knowledge and proficiency in the ways of Christ...and understanding of the Sacrament," he asserted, "and If I find them not deficient, before the Sacrament, I declare to the church that...nothing appear...why they should not partake with us in the Holy feast."[10]

Woodbridge could not understand why he was accused of being too "large" in his principles. Sadly, he commented that it seemed the opinion of many "that the infected and the infectious will breake in at the church-doors unless every brother be allowed a certainty of his pulse and...of his breast."[11] What he described was, of course, the desire by members to be allowed to pass judgment on the qualifications of every applicant, a desire indicating a mood among the laity similar to that of neighboring Massachusetts where, as Woodbridge had indicated earlier, each layman demanded a voice in church government.

Among the questions of polity creating dissension in the Valley churches, Woodbridge considered membership requirements the most vexing. In the preceding year alone, he stated unhappily, three churches--including Hartford and Stratford--divided into separate congregations and in each instance arguments over admission procedures were important sources of strife. As a good Presbyterian attempting to score points against Congregationalism, however, Woodbridge found the real problem to be in the unbridled power of the laity in most churches. They had "too much live and Liberty," he lamented, and seemed bent on "trampling themselves."[12]

Woodbridge also cited the limits of infant baptism as a source of much controversy. Here he implied that much of the problem lay with non-members demanding baptism for their children--non-members, that is, with no claim to the covenant and not qualified for half-way membership. "I thinke the bottome and rise of our contentions," he concluded, "is that men of worth and understanding cannot bear to have their children orphane-like, deprived of the Legacy that Christ has left them, and that other children should be markt for sheep and their own, as good as the other, be left out for goates."[13]

But, above all else, Woodbridge cited as the ultimate source of dissension the traditional loyalties of laymen and ministers to one of three systems of church government: Presbyterian, rigid Congregationalist, and moderate Congregationalist. Commenting on the dissolution of the Hartford church he wrote that the dispute appeared needless. The Presbyterians--the majority group--offered the dissidents the right to "practice their own judgments," but the dissidents refused. They elected to withdraw from communion rather than compromise. In the other afflicted churches, Woodbridge observed, the reverse was true. The Independents were in the majority. They showed no such tolerant spirit as was exhibited by the majority of the Hartford members. Presbyterians were told either to keep silent or leave, and, in several instances, opted for the latter. Clearly, Woodbridge concluded, though particular issues were of great import the hatred and intransigence exhibited by opposing factions could only be explained as the product of years of adherence to rival polities.[14]

John Woodbridge, Jr's. letters to Richard Baxter are revealing for several reasons. By his own admission Woodbridge exposed what he considered to be the hypocrisy of the New England churches. To the world they proclaimed an unprecedented purity of discipline. They boasted of the holy nature of their "errand" into the wilderness and how successful they were in bringing it to fruition, yet when one penetrated behind the facade of rhetoric their lay the passion of dissension and disagreement. Between the lines of his letters to Baxter was an unwritten plea for an explanation of how such a state of affairs could come to pass. Woodbridge's written question was how uniformity and harmony could be established in a troubled land where, after three and one-half decades of settlement, the society appeared on the verge of dissolution. Baxter's mouth no doubt curled in wry amusement and his mind filled with memories of long-forgotten struggles as he read the young divines epistles.

Moreover, Woodbridge's letters were specific in assigning blame for the churches' problems--competing theories of discipline. The polities were clearly defined: Presbyterian, moderate Congregationalist, rigid Congregationalist. Obviously the factions were well-entrenched; else why would Woodbridge have been so unhesitating in giving them party labels? In addition, he was specific as to the exact questions of discipline at issue: the power of the fraternity versus the power of the elders, the authority of church councils; the baptism of children of non-members; and, finally, the requirements for church membership, the nature of a "visible saint."

Woodbridge's labels for the groups competing in the Connecticut Valley were terms which would have been familiar to his contemporaries though his attempts to ascribe certain precise views to those groups might have caused controversy. Terms such as Presbyterian and Congregationalist, though having precise denominational meanings in the present day, were often vague and imprecise words in the seventeenth century. Often too, they were merely words of opprobrium. But Woodbridge was writing for a foreign reader not well versed on New England's affairs and he no doubt felt the need to be precise for purposes of clarification and explication.

This author had done much the same in this study. He has adopted Woodbridge's terms and applied them to diverse groups at many different points in the text while knowing that, for example, the term "moderate Congregationalist" was not often used in, say, 1700.

Also, he has given these terms fairly precise definitions, knowing all the while that, in the context of the seventeenth century, such an act can be almost as misleading as an attempt to call the antagonists in Massachusetts' famous "Goody Sherman Sow Case" Whigs and Tories.

But without such precise categorization analysis would be meaningless or, perhaps, even impossible. Moreover, the author is convinced that the struggle described by Woodbridge began with the first settlement of the country and continued at least to the Great Awakening in the eighteenth century. He is convinced, as well, that the competing factions Woodbridge described--and the issues separating them--also remained much the same during the seventeenth century. Therefore, for purposes of clarity, the author has accepted the risks involved and has adopted Woodbridge's terms and his definitions of those terms as tools for analysis.

In general, the "rigid Congregationalist" was the zealous guardian of the concept of the church as voluntary association; a haven for God's elect in a world of sin. Hence, he opposed any measure likely to "corrupt" the membership with unregenerates and was likely to demand a stringent test for admission, including a public narration of the "time and manner" of an individual's conversion. He was opposed to the extension of baptism beyond the children of members (thus he opposed the "Half-Way Covenant) and was fiercely antagonistic to any proposal likely to compromise either the autonomy of the individual congregation or the "power of the fraternity." In the early years rigid Congregationalism could be found among clergy and laity alike. In the later years of the century, however, it became more and more a lay phenomenon as a considerable number of ministers began to see that, carried to its logical extreme, it stripped the clergyman of most of his authority and made him a pawn of the whims of the brethren.

Moderate Congregationalism was the most popular of the three positions throughout much of the century. It too relished the concept of the church as voluntary association, upheld the principles of congregational autonomy, the power of the fraternity, and the maintenance of church purity. But the moderate differed from the rigid Congregationalist in two important areas. First, he believed that complete congregational purity was impossible and that some chaff was always going to be found in the wheat. Therefore, he opposed the rigid Congregationalist's attempt to create a kind of moat between the church and the world; a moat across which only the truly regenerate could pass. The moderate opposed, for example, a too strenuous test for admission, believing that no man could ever truly understand the condition of another's soul. The moderate was more evangelical than his rigid brethren and was less likely to see the church as a haven for God's elect than as a force for the conversion of sinners. This placed him in a severe dilemma for, in pursuing his evangelicalism, he often found himself supporting measures like the Half-Way Covenant which tended to subvert the voluntary nature of the church. Second, the moderate wanted more power vested in the hands of the church elders, both lay and clerical; than his rigid colleague. As the century progressed, as moderate Congregationalism became more and more clergy-oriented, and as the power of the minister declined, the moderate worked harder to see some sort of formalized power placed in the hands of the clergy. He supported church councils and synods, and later, ministerial associations, and as the churches became the bastions of rigid views, he sought the justification and formalization of clerical power by some method other than the mere consent of the brethren.

In the early years--up to about 1665--moderate Congregationalists, both lay and clerical, were often called, erroneously, Presbyterians by their detractors. Their views were Presbyterian-like, at least by the standards of the time. The clergy believed that the minister possessed considerable power in deciding matters of discipline and doctrine and expected the brethren to accept their pronouncements. Also, both lay and clerical "Presbyterians" tended to advocate liberal requirements for baptism and generally endorsed the concept of the upright life as sufficient grounds for church membership. Yet, though they tended to compromise the principle of the church as voluntary association and tended to mock the principle of congregational power and autonomy as well, they were Congregationalists and eschewed any other polity. By 1700 this "Presbyterianism" was basic to much of the moderate Congregationalist position.

True Presbyterianism, characterized by a belief in the concept of the parish church as well as the principle of synodical government, did not develop in the Connecticut Valley until the 1660's. It failed to generate much support among laymen. Rather its adherents were clergy who reacted to the anti-clericalism and the seeming anarchy in church and society in the late 17th century and turned to Presbyterianism as a method for the placement of ruling power and authority in the hands of the ministry. Also, the Presbyterian system appealed to many clergymen because, at a time when church membership seemed to be declining and the church slipping as a potent force in the life of the country, the Presbyterian parish-church, which accepted the inevitability of regenerates and unregenerates mixing together in worship, seemed, to evangelicals, an ideal method for placing sinners under church discipline.

Along these lines, an extreme form of Presbyterianism and evangelicalism was devised by Solomon Stoddard (1643-1729) of Northampton, Massachusetts. In his zeal to place governing power in the hands of the clergy and to simultaneously use the church as an instrument for conversion, Stoddard advocated an "Instituted Church" ruled solely by classes and synods of clergy encompassing the entire community and possessing sacraments "instituted" by Christ for the transmission of grace to sinners. Stoddard's "Instituted Church" represented a complete rejection of the voluntary association of Congregationalism.

These, then, are the categories utilized in this study. There are, of course, numerous exceptions to be found among clergy and laity. The author has classified some ministers, for example, as moderate Congregationalists when, in fact, their views on baptism were "rigid." One finds similar discrepancies among laymen, particularly in the last decades of the seventeenth and first decades of the eighteenth centuries when rigid Congregationalism became almost the private reserve of the laity and tended to emphasize the "power of the fraternity" above all other issues. The author, recognizing the potential for confusion inherent in such a situation, has attempted to point out such exceptions whenever possible.

I

The Valley Ministry, 1636-1670: The Sound of Many Voices

The letters of John Woodbridge to Richard Baxter were written over three decades after the establishment of permanent settlements in the Connecticut Valley. Was the situation he described a recent development, a declension from some golden age when ministers and churches spoke with a single voice? Certainly Thomas Hooker's Survey of the Summe of Church Discipline indicated no dissension over church polity for he proudly proclained that he outlined the "way" of the New England churches and made no mention of the existence of native Presbyterianism or of differences among Congregationalists. Did he not announce that his treatise had the approbation of most of the ministers of Massachusetts and all of the divines along the Connecticut River?[1] Had the situation changed so much between 1645 and 1671 or was Hooker's assumption of orthodoxy and unity an example of the "hypocrisy" so troubling to young Woodbridge? Had there always existed a gap between the rhetoric of New England--Hooker's dream of orthodoxy--and the reality of life in the congregations? Woodbridge certainly thought so.

Despite Hooker's pronouncements concerning conformity of discipline in the churches of New England, the inescapable fact was that it was a dispute over discipline which was partially responsible for Hooker's decision to take his flock from Cambridge into the wilds of Connecticut. Historians generally cite the need for land as the primary factor in that decision[2]--and perhaps rightly so--but that does not negate the existence of sharp disagreement among Bay inhabitants over an issue of fundamental importance in Congregational theory--the nature of the "Visible Saint." Hooker was deeply disturbed by a tendency he saw developing in the infant Bay churches to adopt admission standards so rigid as to exclude from membership well over half of the inhabitants.[3]

Hooker's position on admission was clearly stated in his Survey. A visible saint was no more than the term implied; a person of visible holiness. It was impossible for a man to know with any real degree of assurance the condition of another man's soul for regeneration was a lengthy process and no man could relate with complete accuracy the time at which it began or the manner in which it proceeded. The best to be hoped for was that a trained observer--a minister--might question an individual and probe his thoughts and deeds for "signs" of a change of heart, recognizing all the while that such signs were not always accurate and might mean nothing.

This was an imprecise test for Hooker knew that even a minister could be fooled by the lies of a hypocrite or the answers of a sincere, yet deluded, aspirant. But, for Hooker, it was a risk to be taken. Better that a sinner be admitted than a saint turned away. The "judgment of rational charity" was Hooker's standard for determining saints, and it emphasized charity. Hooker's test for membership was no more than a series of questions asked of the applicant in private by the minister--the laity having no role in such matters. Hooker made no pretense to an attempt to create visible churches conforming to the limits of the invisible church and the membership rolls would, he believed, always contain the names of hypocrites. He simply saw no way to avoid it.[4]

But it was not "rational charity" which emerged as the criterion for membership in the Bay churches. There was, it seemed, an abnormal and unscriptural attempt being made to separate wheat from chaff. What Hooker considered a dangerous belief was gaining strength, a belief that the brethren could know, with certainty, the condition of an applicant's soul. Churches were requiring public professions by aspirants before the entire membership in which each member would be allowed to comment on, and vote for or against, each applicant. Furthermore, it was expected that in their professions applicants would satisfactorily relate the "time and manner" of their conversion.[5]

All of this was anathema to Hooker. Moreover, his problem was heightened by the fact that the leadership of this movement within the churches was assumed by the only other Bay minister of Hooker's stature--John Cotton of Boston's First Church. Samuel Stone, Hooker's colleague at Hartford and life-long friend, alluded to the chasm between the two great divines when he wrote years later that Cotton, upon arrival in New England, gave a public relation of his conversion before the Boston church although he was a "saint" of unimpeachable quality. Hooker, Stone commented, never acceded to such a test while an inhabitant of New England though there was pressure placed on him to do so.[6]

Whatever the economic reasons for the migration of Hooker's people, the demand for purity of membership Hooker found in the Bay churches was a question which weighed heavily on his mind. That it was a significant factor in his decision to leave was attested to by the text of one of his last sermons delivered before leaving the Bay. He severely criticized his listeners for too zealously striving after purity and told them of the great fear in his heart that soon the churches of the Bay would be surrounded by the unchurched persons who would be easy prey for anyone desirous of promoting another church way. "Now although I knowe all must not be admytted," he concluded, "yet this may do much hurt, if one come amongst you of another minde, and they schould joyne with hym."[7]

In Connecticut, no doubt, Hooker hoped to avoid the mistake of the Bay churches. His mission in New England--and that of his compatriots--was the creation of churches institutionalizing the great truths of the Protestant Reformation. Of these truths none was more central to New England's purpose, as Hooker saw it, than the enshrinement of Congregational church polity. This according to Hooker, was the last truth revealed to the reformers by God. It was the culmination of a century of Reformation and was the missing link in the restoration of primitive Christianity and the primitive churches.[8]

A decade after leaving the Bay colony, however, Hooker lashed out at Presbyterian Samuel Rutherford with a sense of confidence and assurance lacking in his farewell to Massachusetts. The churches of New England, he wrote in the Survey, were firmly established. They were without error, without dissension. They were sound in doctrine, orthodox in polity, and that polity was Congregational. To Hooker there no longer seemed to be the threat of "another mynde." His Survey of the Summe of Church Discipline outlined the "Way" of the New England churches. "In all these," he concluded, "I have leave to professe the joint judgment of all the Elders upon the river: of New Haven, Guilford, Milford, Stratford, Fairfield."[9] There was not the slightest hint of dissension, not a trace of disharmony. Seemingly, his controversy with Cotton and with the Bay churches had not followed him into the Wilderness and yet, less than a quarter of a century later, another Valley minister, John Woodbridge, Jr., would tell a far different story. His portrait of the Valley churches would be one of confusion, disorder, and bitter division in which the progress of the churches and the peace of the society were being hindered by the unceasing warfare of adherents to three rival polities: Presbyterian, rigid Congregationalist, and moderate Congregationalist.

Among the ministers these divisions were not new. Hooker may have proclaimed the loyal adherence of the Valley clergy to the views presented in the Survey but an appraisal of the positions of certain ministers of Hooker's own generation reveals considerable deviation from the New England "Way" as set forth by the Hartford divine. True, the record of the ministry in those early years was not one of dissension. There was little evidence of damaging public arguments over polity, no hints of bitterness among ministers. There were, seemingly, no real Presbyterians in the Rutherfordian mold of adherence to a national church. There was a facade of conformity, or orthodoxy. Yet, beneath the facade was disagreement over polity; the nature of which conformed roughly to the three categories of discipline cited by Woodbridge.

Of these categories Woodbridge classified the greatest number of divines as rigid Congregationalists. Their rigidity was determined by their positions on four questions of polity: requirements for admission, baptism, the legitimacy of councils or synods, and the power of the fraternity. The rigid Congregationalist, Woodbridge explained, placed all ecclesiastical authority in the brethren, limited baptism to children of members, denied the legitimacy of councils or synods, and favored a very restrictive admission policy. Clearly Hooker-with one exception-did not fit this mold. He found synods to be scriptural, so long as they performed only an advisory function. He opposed restrictive membership requirements and, though viewing ecclesiastical authority as the prerogative of the brethren, argued that much of it was transferred to the elders and remained with them so long as they performed the duties of their office. Only on baptism was Hooker "rigid," arguing that it was meant only for children of members.[10]

Hooker's colleague in Hartford, Samuel Stone, represented a more "Presbyterian" position. The Teacher of the church from its inception, Stone avoided public disagreement with Hooker during the latter's lifetime, but, after Hooker's death in 1647, Stone's own peculiar notions began to emerge and the result was the creation of a deep chasm within the membership of the Hartford church. Stone published no systematic treatment of his views on church government.[11] However, in the early 1650's, he did write a short treatise on church membership in response to a growing movement within his church to institute a more rigid test for membership, including a public profession of the "time and manner" of conversion. Stone's treatise demonstrated that his views were broader even than Hooker's. His criteria for admission were simply a blameless life and a sound knowledge of Christian doctrine. He required no evidence of saving grace, no account of a conversion experience. Indeed, he argued that the condition of a man's soul was beyond the knowledge of mortals.[12]

Much of Stone's treatise resembled Hooker's argument. The most significant difference lay in what each man meant by the term "Knowledge." For Hooker it meant evidence of experimental piety[13] given to the minister in private conference but to Stone it meant nothing more than a public affirmation of a confession of faith. "It may be convenient," he wrote, "for such to make a Profession of the Principal Articles of the Creed to manifest their Knowledg: Without which they are not Visible Saints."[14] That profession, plus a life free of scandal, was sufficient for admission.

Stone's views, if implemented, would have created a parish church in Hartford with only obvious sinners excluded from membership. Small wonder then that a dispute broke out within the church when his views became known for some brethren, believing their church already polluted by unregenerates, demanded more rigid standards and a greater emphasis on purity. That group was led by Elder William Goodwin, one of the oldest members of the church and a lifelong friend of both Hooker and Stone. Stone became such an object of hatred to Goodwin's followers that in 1658 they withdrew and went up river to Hadley, Massachusetts.[15]

But it was not only Stone's notion of church membership that caused dissension. His conception of the authority of the minister also provoked controversy and clearly separated him from the views espoused by Hooker. In the latter's Congregationalism, ecclesiastical authority proceeded from Christ to individual congregations, and the power of the eldership was conferred by the brethren through election. The authority of elders and brethren was sharply delineated in Hooker's scheme. The minister pronounced doctrine, the brethren determined questions of censure, excommunication and other matters of government and the two jointly decided admissions. But Stone held a loftier notion of the authority of the minister; one which became apparent in the course of his difficulties with his church. In 1655 or 56, when the church voted to call young Michael Wigglesworth of Massachusetts as Stone's associate, the elder minister vetoed the decision, arguing that the selection of a minister was essentially his prerogative. Later, while residing in self-imposed exile in Massachusetts, he sought a reconciliation with the church--on his own terms. He stated explicitly that he would return only if the church allowed him to make his own selection of an associate and only if they agreed to adhere to his pronouncements on doctrine and practice. The latter requirement, of course, referred to his views on membership requirements and would have entailed not only a rejection by the church of the view of Goodwin's faction but of Hooker's as well. Stone's terms were accepted by a majority of the church; but the vociferous minority under Goodwin chose instead to sever their church relation and move to Hadley.[16]

Although Stone's position on ministerial authority made him a "Presbyterian" in the eyes of his enemies, there is no evidence to indicate he ever publicly or privately endorsed synodical government. There is, however, considerable evidence showing that he recognized a power in properly constituted church councils far exceeding the advisory capacity envisioned by Hooker. Such evidence emerges from his difficulties with his church. In 1656, after his pronouncement on membership and his rejection of Wigglesworth, the Connecticut General Court called a Council of neighboring elders and brethren to try to settle the Hartford problem. The council found for the dissenters. Stone, supported by many in his church, refused to abide by the decision, arguing that the Council had not taken into account his version of the affair. The General Court responded by asking the elders from several Bay churches to come and find a settlement. That was done in 1657 with the Council, composed solely of ministers, siding with Stone. The Council, however, was able to effect a reconciliation between the two groups, one which lasted only until Stone presented the conditions under which he was willing to reunite with the church. Those conditions were preceded by a letter in which Stone noted that because of the gap between his own notions of church discipline and those of many of his flock, the pacification might be short lived. "I am utterly unable to act those great and difficult matters of church government which must be attended with you," he wrote. "My judgment may also in some things be different from yours, which may be a cause of future breach."[17]

The dissenters withdrew from the church as soon as Stone's conditions were known. Stone then petitioned the General Court for a public debate with the dissenters and argued that the onus for disrupting the peace of the community now lay with them. Their guilt came from their illegal withdrawal and from their violation of the decision of the Massachusetts Council. Stone argued that the decision, because it was agreed to by both parties, was binding. Why the second Council's decision was binding when that of the first one was not was justified by Stone in the Council's diligence in hearing all opinions and, above all, in the fact that its decision was accepted by both sides. Thus, in arguing that councils somethimes had decisive power he went beyond Hooker but considerably short of synodical rule.[18]

Stone differed from Hooker in at least two additional areas of discipline. One concerned the question of baptism of children of non-members whose own parents were members. That practice--later to be a part of the Half-Way Covenant--was opposed by Hooker. In the Survey he showed sensitivity to what was evidently considerable feeling in the Valley in favor of the practice but rejected it just the same. He sympathized with parents caught in such a situation and grieved that small children should suffer for parents' failures, yet he found no scriptural support for its establishment. Stone, on the other hand, found the necessary sanction and, upon Hooker's death, became the leader of Valley ministers favoring its adoption. Ultimately he was instrumental in organizing and obtaining support for the proposal from a synod of Connecticut ministers meeting at Hartford in 1656.[19]

The other issue was that of the obligation of churches to the children of full members. Stone believed that any such child not openly scandalous had a right to automatic admission to full membership upon attaining adulthood. It was a theory Hooker could not accept and one which more rigid Independents considered contrary to the maintenance of a pure church. Yet it was a practice favored by some Valley churches and ministers from the first. Commenting on the question in a 1650 letter to Richard Mather of Dorchester, Stone informed Mather that unless the Bay ministry met in Council that year and publicly opposed the practice, many Valley churches would follow their inclinations and adopt it. "Unless there may be some conference of Elders, this year, in the Bay, that we may see some reason to the contrary," he wrote, "our churches will adventure to practice according to their judgment, i.e., to take in all such children as members."[20]

The ecclesiastical notions of John Warham, the first minister of Windsor, Connecticut, differed from both of the Hartford ministers in that during his pastorate he identified with several disciplinary positions. His record in New England was one of slow but steady movement from conformity to the Church of England to rigid Congregationalism. Upon arrival in New England in 1631 his non-conformity was still in doubt, at least that was the impression created by a conference between himself and Samuel Fuller, the physician from Plymouth. Warham and some others had become embroiled in a heated argument concerning the latitude of the visible church, and Fuller was called upon to arbitrate the disagreement. He reported to Governor Bradford of Plymouth that "I have been at Mattapan, at the request of Mr. Warham. I had conference with them till I was weary. Mr. Warham holds that the visible church may consist of a mixed people, godly and openly ungodly, upon which point we had all our conference to which, I trust, the Lord will give a blessing."[21]

Warham's group settled first at Dorchester, Massachusetts, then served as the vanguard of migration into the Connecticut Valley in 1636, founding the community of Windsor. After settlement at Windsor, Warham moved slowly toward Congregationalism. One of Thomas Hooker's last acts before his death in 1657 was a journey to Windsor to castigate Warham and his church for their refusal to accept the notion of a particular church covenant. Moreover, Hooker also urged the church and its minister to adopt a more restrictive posture in administering baptism. "Some say," he stated before the congregation, "that a church covenant is but a conceit taken up of some--and that baptism should be dispensed but to children of the Church, they say it is but a conceit, to please some in a singular way; and so discourage from the truth as impossible ever to have comfort."[22] The Windsor church adopted a covenant in the same year and restricted baptism to the children of members. A decade later, however, the latter requirement was relaxed to include the children of non-members whose own parents were members.[23]

In the 1660's Warham's ecclesiastical ideas moved closer to rigid Congregationalism. Aged and perhaps concerned by the spectre of impending death, Warham was beset by melancholy and despair. He grew convinced of his own sinfulness and believed that his ministry had served the Devil rather than the Lord. As a result in 1664 he suspended the baptism of the children of non-members, excusing his behavior with the explanation that he had wrestled with his conscience and concluded the practice unsound.[24] Furthermore, he was instrumental in tightening membership requirements for the church. Prospective members began to be examined by the entire membership whereas, previously, the examination was before the Elders.[25]

Moreover, in 1664, Warham was confronted with a number of families--recent arrivals from England--who desired membership in the Windsor church on the strength of their membership in the Church of England. Warham, who had once viewed the true church as a mixed collection of godly and ungodly, rejected the applicants, thus upholding, as did many rigid Congregationalists, that the Church of England was not a true church. The aggrieved brethren, also refused admission by Samuel Stone's successor in Hartford, John Whiting, petitioned the General Court for redress, asking why membership in one church was not sufficient grounds for membership in another.[26]

Warham's shift to rigid Congregationalism precipitated a great rift within his church in the mid-1660's and he was powerless to effect a compromise, so obsessed was he by his earlier "mistakes." His melancholy increased as did his hatred for the "Presbyterianism" of those who opposed him. In 1668, only weeks before his death, he was asked to go to Hartford to arbitrate a new outbreak of fighting between "Presbyterians" and Congregationalists" in that church. Samuel Whiting led the Congregationalists, while the Presbyterian faction rallied around young John Haynes--hired in 1664 as Stone's replacement. One Sunday, while Haynes baptized the child of a Half-Way member, Warham suddenly rose from his seat and gave Haynes a verbal thrashing for following an unscriptural practice. The astonished congregation listened in silence as Warham heaped abuse on the young Hartford minister. The harangue lasted for many minutes until Warham concluded his remarks by telling Haynes what he thought of Presbyterians. He then stormed from the church.[27]

Throughout his career Warham was a parish minister who devoted little time to putting thoughts on paper. But, at some point near the end of his life, he felt compelled to systematize some of his ideas on church discipline. He wrote the outline for a proposed treatise to be entitled "On the Form and Matter of a Church." It was to be ostensibly, another attack on Samuel Rutherford's Presbyterianism and, considering the evolution of Warham's thoughts on church membership, it was probably written in the late 1650's or 1660's. The treatise was devoted to the not unfamiliar proposition that the visible church should be composed only of visible saints. Warham's definition of a visible saint clearly placed him among the rigid Congregationalists of the Valley. Visible sanctity was based not on the life or "conversation" of an aspirant but on his ability to prove regeneration through a relation of the time and manner of his conversion. The visible church--for Warham--was composed solely of persons able to give public evidence of a change of heart. He concluded that it was the church's great duty to be ever vigilant against the admission of hypocrites, a rigidity both Hooker and Stone opposed.[28]

It was just such rigidity which caused a storm in the Windsor church in the 1660's and precipitated the formation of "Congregational" and "Presbyterian" factions. In addition, Warham's advanced age forced him to cancel performance of many of the duties expected of him and to urge the church to hire a younger man to take his place. The new minister, Israel Chauncey, assumed most of the duties of the ministerial office and Warham subsequently went into semi-retirement. Chauncey healed the rift--at least for a time--by allowing the church to move away from Warham's positions on admission and baptism, particularly by reinstituting the Half-Way Covenant in 1667. That, no doubt, served to increase poor Warham's sense of "melancholy."[29]

Another example of rigid Congregationalism among early ministers of the Valley and its environs was to be found in Henry Whitefield, first minister of Guilford. Whitefield, unlike Warham, was linked with Separatist notions. Son of an eminent lawyer, he rejected law in favor of the ministry and spent twenty years at Ockham, Surrey, in a position both spiritually and financially rewarding. After a few years in Ockham he obtained an assistant, thus freeing himself from many parish duties and allowing time for the pursuance of his real desire, an itinerant ministry among the poor and needy of the area. During his travels he became acquainted with several divines actively opposing the Church of England, and it was on the occasion of one of his trips among the needy that he participated in a discussion with John Cotton and several other ministers and became convinced of the truths of Congregationalism.[30]

Through his work he developed a large coterie of devoted followers. As England became increasingly inhospitable to persons of his persuasion, Whitefield was forced to resign his lucrative position in Surrey and, being without means of support, he decided to take his followers to New England and there to establish a new home. Thus, he made arrangements for their settlement on George Fenwick's patent between Saybrook and New Haven and, in 1639, departed for the New World.[31]

The migration of Whitefield's group differed from similar ventures in that they expressed no interest in affiliating with either the infant settlements of Connecticut or New Haven colonies. Whitefield intended the establishment of a separate colony where he and his followers could be free to create a pure church and pure government modelled on scripture. Such was accomplished in the settlement of Guilford and the Rev. John Davenport, leader of the New Haven settlement, was informed the new community would have nothing to do with his settlement nor would it accept rule by New Haven's government. In 1643 the Guilford settlers formed a church and announced the "mayne ends" of settlement in New England, "namely, that wee might settle and uphold all the ordinances of God in an explicit congregational church way, with most purity, peace and liberty, for the benefit both of ourselves and our posterities after us."[32] Obviously the maintenance of that "purity, peace and liberty" meant no contact even with neighboring--and thoroughly Congregationalist--New Haven lest noble purposes be somehow corrupted.

The insular nature of the Guilford experiment and of its leader, Whitefield, was demonstrated further during the formation of the church. No attempt was made to invite representatives of other churches nor was it considered necessary to obtain the approbation of neighboring churches for what was to be done. Furthermore, the group abolished the temporary town government established in 1639, saying that it believed only church members could vote or hold office. Thus, since no church existed before 1643, there were no proven saints, and hence, no persons truly qualified for office or voting. With the formation of the church, saints could be identified, taken into the church and a body politic created.[33]

Whitefield, who provided much of the theory for the practice of the Guilford settlers, obviously gave no credence to the claim of prior membership in the Church of England. Though most inhabitants were probably church members in England, none was allowed membership in the Guilford Church, nor allowed to vote or hold office in the town, until thoroughly "examined" by their peers. Each needed evidence of regeneration before political or ecclesiastical rights were conferred. Curiously, however, neither minister nor people deemed it necessary for Whitefield to be ordained by his new church. He was ordained as a minister of the Church of England and received a second "ordination" from his flock before departure from England. That was considered sufficient. Also, the church was formed without the traditional New England covenant. Instead, the members subscribed to articles of faith.[34]

In addition to his other views Whitefield's position on the "power of the fraternity" placed him firmly in the camp of rigid Congregationalism and was, in fact, more extreme than most of his ministerial colleagues. The brethren, he believed, maintained decisive authority in all matters save those directly connected with the spiritual function of the minister. To Whitefield that meant that the membership made all decisions relating to either doctrine or practice and could delegate no authority to officers. Hence, save for minister and teacher, the Guilford church had no officers at all--deacons and ruling elders being declared unnecessary and unscriptural.[35] That his people accepted this position was evidenced ten years later when John Higginson was installed as Whitefield's successor. The church refused to allow ministers from neighboring churches to participate in the ordination ceremony, arguing that the minister's authority came from the congregation and that only brethren could be allowed to perform the ordination. Not a little discussion was caused in the area by the church's stand. Two years later in a letter to the Rev. Thomas Thatcher of Weymouth, Massachusetts, Higginson wrote of the difficulty of independent churches reaching agreement on the true form of the primitive church, an obvious reference to the differences over church government between his own church and its neighbors. "I have thought the great design of Jesus Christ in this age is to set up his Kingdom in particular churches," he wrote, "and yet the great duty of such as are in church fellowship, is to conform themselves to those primitive patterns."[36]

In the Valley's early years much of the so-called "Presbyterianism" was centered in Wethersfield, but whether it was true Presbyterianism or just an extreme form of moderate Congregationalism is difficult to say since Presbyterianism was not legally tolerated and a bonafide Presbyterian could not publicly admit his allegiance. According to John Woodbridge, Jr., in 1670 Wethersfield was a true Presbyterian church under the care of Gershom Bulkeley, son of Rev. Peter Bulkeley of Massachusetts. But Bulkeley had only served the church since 1667 while a "Presbyterian" faction had existed in the congregation since the early 1640's. In all likelihood, however, the views of the early "Presbyterians" were similar to those of Samuel Stone of Hartford; endorsing ministerial authority as well as the "broad" or "parish" way in such matters as baptism and church membership.[37]

Although little is known of Wetherfield's first minister, Henry Smith (1636-1648), he was at least partially responsible for a controversy in the church and the community in 1639. The church was formed in 1636 with six initial members. Oddly enough, three of the six were ministers: Smith, Richard Denton and John Sherman, with all evidently serving the church in an equal capacity. Within a year the situation was further complicated by the addition of a fourth minister, Peter Prudden. Few churches could absorb four ministers and Wethersfield was no exception. Within a year after the arrival of Prudden the community was rocked by a great dispute, much of it due to a "want of lotts" among new settlers. Yet it also had ecclesiastical overtones and in the space of a few months three of the four ministers left the community, taking sizable numbers of the inhabitants with them. Denton returned to England with one group. Prudden and Sherman went to Milford, Connecticut, with a second. Other smaller groups migrated to New Haven, Stratford and Saybrook. At one point, John Davenport of New Haven was asked to mediate the differences between the warring factions. That he was called in, and not the General Court, seems to suggest the existence of an ecclesiastical controversy. Davenport blamed Smith and his followers for much of the disturbance and hinted that Smith's notions of church government were too authoritarian to be Congregational. He concluded that the principles of many of the disputants--particularly the Smith faction--were "not according with those of Connecticut."[38]

Smith's successor in Wethersfield, John Russell, also became a center of controversy, most of which stemmed from his alleged "Presbyterianism." His problems began soon after his arrival in 1656, but reached a peak when he excommunicated one of the members of his church without benefit of church trial. The member, Lt. John Hollister, quickly organized a movement to obtain Russell's ouster and, within a short time, the community was bitterly divided. The dispute focused on the nature and extent of the minister's authority with Hollister's group arguing that excommunication and censure were functions of the membership. The struggle dragged on for six years during which time more of Russell's ecclesiastical ideas were questioned. For Russell's supporters the primary issue became the right of the town to meddle in church affairs since, curiously, many of Hollister's supporters proved to be non-members. Finally, in 1658, Russell and a majority of his church moved to Hadley, Massachusetts, where they were joined by remnants of the churches of Hartford and Windsor.[39]

That was not the end of "Presbyterianism" in Wethersfield, however. With only seven remaining members the church reorganized and, for nine years, existed with a series of interim ministers, none of whom seemed interested in staying. Ultimately, in 1667, the church procured the services of two young ministers, Gershom Bulkeley and Samuel Stone, Jr., son of Samuel Stone of Hartford. Bulkeley came to Wethersfield from New London where he had served since 1661. An avowed believer in synodical rule--and one of the first ministers in the Valley to admit such a view publicly--Bulkeley had been hired by New London despite his Presbyterianism. The church granted him "freedom of conscience" yet warned him that if he sought to overturn their Congregational polity he would be dismissed. Bulkeley agreed but evidently found the pledge too much to bear for, in 1666, the church forced him to resign. Samuel Stone, Jr. came to Wethersfield from Harvard and was hired as teacher, serving until 1677 when his career was terminated by a peculiar accident. An ardent believer in the redeeming qualities of distilled spirits, he was quenching his thirst one day at a spot beyond the prying eyes of the congregation when he fell into the Connecticut River and drowned.[40]

These brief sketches of the ecclesiastical notions of some of the early Valley clergy show clearly that Hooker's assumption in the *Survey* that all his colleagues adhered to his particular brand of Congregationalism was a myth. Numerous differences of opinion on polity separated the members of the Valley ministry and the nature and significance of those differences became only too clear in the 1650's and 1660's when ecclesiastical disputes affected most of the churches in and around the Connecticut Valley. The problems of Wethersfield, Windsor and Hartford were noted earlier in the chapter. Similar struggles plagued other communities, and, in nearly every instance, the ecclesiastical questions were the same--baptism, church membership, the power of the church *viz a viz* the minister, and the nature and power of councils--the same questions vexing the clergy.[41]

The Valley churches were remarkably tranquil from 1636 to 1652 save for the bitter controversy in Wethersfield in the late thirties and early forties. Then, in the early fifties, controversies developed in Hartford and Wethersfield and quickly spread to other Valley towns such as Windsor and throughout Connecticut in general to such diverse places as New Haven, Stratford, Middletown and Fairfield. The transition from harmony to bitterness and deep division in only a few short years was amazing. Nor were the disputes short-lived. The Hartford struggle, for example, was not settled until the late 1670's and Wethersfield knew no lasting peace until the advent of the ministry of Stephen Mix in 1684. The ministry could not have been insensitive to the ecclesiastical differences among themselves nor could they have avoided detecting the spread of those differences to their people. They must have been aware of the dangers inherent in such divisions; dangers to their own power and prestige, the stability of their churches and, in general, to the peace of the land. Yet, at first, they did little to stem the rising tide of controversy. The Hartford controversy, for example, was at least four years old before a council of neighboring elders was convened to try to settle it (1656). The Wethersfield trouble raged for six years before any authority, civil or ecclesiastical, sought to quell it (1658).

The impotence of the Valley clergy stemmed from several sources and among them was a tendency of the ministers in the early years to view their land as an appendage to the Bay. They felt no distinct community of interests apart from those of their Massachusetts colleagues and thought only in terms of the churches of "New England," not of those of Connecticut and Massachusetts. The sense of unity was evident in Hooker's Survey where the discipline he enunciated was not that of a single colony but of "New England." Thus the Valley ministry--save perhaps for Hooker--looked to the Bay for leadership and guidance. Samuel Stone's 1651 letter to Richard Mather of Dorchester, cited earlier, gives eloquent testimony to that dependence; unless the Bay ministry indicated disapproval, Stone wrote, some of the churches of the Valley would change their admission practices.[42]

Such a letter was clear indication that the Valley clergy felt a sense of inferiority to their colleagues in Massachusetts and looked to the Bay for solutions to their ecclesiastical dilemmas. That explained the Valley's role--or lact of one--at the Cambridge synod of 1648. The synod, proclaimed as the attempt of the churches of New England to reach agreement on a common body of doctrine and a common polity, was, when set against the diverse notions of the Valley clergy, a masterful defense of moderate Congregationalism. It conformed in most respects to the doctrine of Hooker's Survey of Church Discipline but it differed from many of the ideas held by a Samuel Stone, or a John Warham, or a Henry Whitefield, or a John Russell. Yet the names of those ministers who haggled over doctrine and discipline at Cambridge do not include any of the aforementioned. Thomas Parker and James Noyes of Newbury, John Wilson, John Norton and John Cotton of Boston, and Richard Mather of Dorchester argued and decided at Cambridge; none spoke for the Valley. Valley clergymen made no attempt to air their disagreements on polity, but were content to let the Bay clergy speak for them. As a result, their differences remained--and grew.[43]

Within a decade of Cambridge the Valley churches were in turmoil and again the ministers looked to the Bay for help. Samuel Stone, driven from his church in 1656, retired to Boston for solace and urged the Connecticut General Court to summon the Bay clergy to find a solution to his difficulties in Hartford. The Court acceded and between 1656 and 1659 Jonathan Mitchell of Cambridge and numerous of his colleagues made two difficult--and dangerous--trips to Hartford in a futile attempt to restore peace to Hooker's church and Valley. In the meantime the dissension spread to neighboring communities, far too many to be settled by the reverend elders of the Bay in individual councils.[44]

As a more workable solution the ministers of the

Valley suggested that Connecticut instigate a call for a new Synod of New England Churches to discuss the issues vexing the Valley communities. The General Court complied and sent a copy of twenty-one questions for discussion to the Courts of Massachusetts, Plymouth and New Haven. Plymouth did not bother to reply while New Haven's return bristled with anger. Written by John Davenport the letter mentioned the Connecticut church disputes, the strange doctrines prevalent in that region, and concluded with a ringing denunciation of the "innovations" proposed by the Connecticut Court. The whole notion of a synod was, Davenport wrote, a Presbyterian plot to undermine New England's adherence to Congregationalism. "We hear," he concluded, "the petitioners or others closing with them, are very confident they shall obtain alterations, both in civil government and in church discipline, and that some of them have procured or hired one, as their agent, to maintain in writing...that parishes in England consenting to and continuing their meetings to worship God, are true churches. And such persons coming over hither (without holding forth any work of faith, etc.) have a right to all our church privileges, and probably they expect their Deputy should employ himself and improve his interest to spread and press such paradoxes in the Massachusetts, yea at Synod meeting."[45]

Massachusetts consented to the synod but submitted its own list of questions for discussion. Although neither the questions from Massachusetts nor Connecticut are now in existence at least one student of the period has suggested that Massachusetts refused a Connecticut suggestion for a full-blown debate on the merits of Presbyterian government and also refused another suggestion that Presbyterians be granted legal toleration.[46] Connecticut reluctantly accepted a modified agenda and in June, 1657, the representatives of the two colonies met in Boston. After two weeks of debate the synod issued answers to twenty-one questions, chief among them being an affirmation of support for the baptism of children of baptized parents (the essence of the later Half-Way Covenant) and an extremely murky statement on membership requirements. The Connecticut clergy submitted the results to the General Court where they were accepted; the Court in turn, submitted them to the churches for consideration. The results were entirely unexpected. Instead of soothing the ruffled feelings of warring congregations, the proposals merely intensified the heat of the disputes. The expected restoration of harmony and tranquility did not happen and the synod's work went for naught.[47]

Another synod of the "New England churches" would meet in Boston five years later to draft the "Half-Way Covenant" and to make a statement on the legitimacy of "consociations of churches," but for Connecticut the failure of the 1657 meeting to find a solution to the churches' problems cut the unbilical cord with the Bay. Never again would the Valley ministry look to the whole of the New England clergy for direction. The failure of the 1657 synod brought home to the Connecticut clergy a terrible fact: the key to the restoration of peace in their churches would have to be found in Connecticut.

The initial reaction was to look to the General Court for guidance. Where councils of area ministers failed to bring peace to a particular church--and they failed often--the matter became the concern of the Court. In the case of Hartford, for example, after the failure of councils in 1656 and 1657, the Court sought to interject its good offices as mediator. In 1658 the Court passed new laws specifying a "legal" method for the organization of new churches, forbade withdrawals by dissident laymen and in sundry other ways sought to restore peace.[48] The highlight of its activity was a 1659 decree that, if the factions in Hartford did not meet with a council of ministers called by the Court, the Court would force the dissenting groups to discuss their grievances until such time as the two sides gave in from sheer exhaustion.[49]

However, the Court's role was fraught with danger. As the civil government it had every right to step into church questions when the peace of the country was threatened, as it certainly was on occasion. But the current Valley disputes required pronouncements on ecclesiastical doctrine, a function beyond the legitimate sphere of civil authority. Doctrinal matters were, the members of the Court knew, for churchmen to decide. Yet the warring factions cried out to the Court to place the stamp of legality on their peculiar notions at the expense of their enemies; to provide Connecticut, in effect, with an ecclesiastical constitution not created by the churches but by the Court. The Court's alternatives seemed few in number for social tranquility appeared to hinge on its assumption of ecclesiastical power. To the Court's credit it did not accept the responsibility which many would have given it. It refused to assume the function of a synod by rendering pronouncements on doctrine, though it did, on one occasion, render an "opinion." The instance was the case of William Pitkin and his followers; the Englishmen denied admission by the Windsor church in 1664. The essence of the dispute was whether persons in good standing in the Church of England deserved automatic admission to the churches of Connecticut or whether they ought first, as John Warham decided, give evidence of regeneration. "Our grievance is," the Englishmen stated in a petition to the Court, "that we and ours, are not under the due care of an orthodox ministry, that will in a due manner administer to us those ordinances that we stand capable of, as the baptising of our children, our being admitted (as we according to Christ's order may be found meet) to the Lord's Table, and a careful watch over us as we do well or ill, with all whatsoever benefits and advantages belong to us as members of Christ's visible church..."[50] They admitted, in obvious reference to Connecticut's turmoils, that they favored neither Presbyterianism nor Independency, but wanted only the blessing of the ordinances and the security of church watch. If they could not be granted these, they concluded, then they requested "that for the future no law in this corporation may be of any force to make us pay or contribute the maintenance of any minister or officer of the church that will neglect or refuse to baptise our children and to take care of us."[51]

The Court's reply was carefully worded to avoid the appearance of an attempt to legislate doctrine or practice. Yet the meaning was clear; John Warham was wrong. The Court "suggested" that it was the obligation of the churches to entertain such persons for membership and to admit "all such persons who are of an honest and godly conversation, having a competency of knowledge in the principles of religion, and shall desire to joyne with them in church fellowship, by an explicite covenant, and that they have their children baptized and that all the children of the church be accepted and accounted reall members of the church." The Court rejected Warham's "rigid" position on membership and recognized the claim of members of the Church of England to participation in the sacraments of the churches of New England.[52]

But the statement on church membership was the limit of the General Court's involvement in determining doctrine and polity for the churches. The Court's feeling after 1664 was that the church's problems would be solved only when the churches reached agreement on an ecclesiastical constitution for the country. It was essentially the same feeling expressed by the ministry before the ill-fated synod of 1657 and let to a call for a new synod in October, 1666.[53]

The ministry responded eagerly to the proposal, and a set of resolutions was drawn up for debate. An invitation was sent to Massachusetts for a joint synod, but the Bay somewhat suspiciously asked the nature of the matters to be discussed. Connecticut's reply was that, perhaps, some of the Bay clergy would rather attend as "observers" without official function in the proceedings. But whether they attended or not, the reply was specific that the synod would go on. The determination, and independence, of the Connecticut Court and clergy was unmistakable.[54]

The synod convened in the Spring of 1667 and its meetings were of historic importance for all of New England. Above all else it represented the first such meeting to be composed solely of the representatives of the churches of a single colony--a sure sign of the independence of Connecticut churches and clergy from Massachusetts. More important it represented a pronouncement by Connecticut's Court and clergy that New England possessed no orthodoxy of belief or practice in matters of church discipline. The synods of 1648 and 1662 might represent orthodoxy in Massachusetts but the call of the Connecticut Court was explicit: the disparity between belief and practice in Connecticut demanded the establishment of a separate constitution, one that would settle, hopefully, that continuing struggle between rigid Congregationalists, moderate Congregationalists and Presbyterians which threatened the destruction of Connecticut society. The synod, declared the Court, was "to consider of some way or means to bring those Ecclesiastical matters that are in difference in the severall Plantations, to an issue." Until that decision came, the "churches and people in this Jurisdiction" were ordered "to suspend all matters controversall (sic) and the practice of them not formerly received and practiced in the Churches here."[55]

The synod--which became an "assembly of ministers" when some rigid Congregationalists objected to such a Presbyterian term--met twice in 1667. Unfortunately for the peace of the churches, it accomplished little for the factions merely harangued. Seventeen questions were proposed by the Court and clergy for discussion by the representatives of the churches. Yet only teachers and ministers were admitted to the meetings, a fact which seemed to supply credence to rigid Congregationalist fears that they were, in truth, watching the first Connecticut "synod." The ministers proved to be as badly divided as the brethren and the debates went on for weeks. Point after point was discussed and no agreement reached. The meeting adjourned in mid-summer then reconvened in October but nothing was decided.[56]

However, the Court and clergy, perhaps foreseeing the possibility of deadlock, had provided an alternative to the adoption of a church platform. Proposal seventeen--the final proposal--asked: "Whether it be not justifiable by the Word of God that Civil Authority indulge Congregational and Presbyterian Churches, and their discipline in the Churches."[57] Months of futile haggling made that proposition suddenly very attractive to the assembled ministers. Their own bickering, they knew, was an accurate reflection of the arguments of their laymen, and their failure to reach agreement on a common discipline suggested to them that no ecclesiastical constitution was feasible for Connecticut at that time. Thus, the possible modes of action were clear. They could do nothing and hope that the disputes would run their natural course--even though Hartford's struggle was in its fifteenth year--or they could endorse toleration and hope that peace would come through the separation of Presbyterians and Congregationalists into distinct churches. The clergy opted for the latter alternative, and a year later the General Court gave legal sanction to their decision.[58]

The synod's decision was a victory for Presbyterianism among the clergy and was highly significant of strength achieved in a relatively short time. A "Presbyterian" tradition had long existed but its early leaders--like Samuel Stone of Hartford--were only Presbyterian-like, arguing for rule by ministerial elders and the "broad way" in matters of admission and baptism, but silent on synodical government. Their generation, however, passed during the church controversies of the 1650's and 1660's to be replaced by a "new" Presbyterianism among younger ministers. That new Presbyteriansim was adamant in its calls for rule by synod and open in its denunciations of Congregationalism. Its adherents among the ministry, though always a minority, proved articulate and stubborn. The leaders, men like Gershom Bulkeley of New London and Wethersfield, John Haynes of First Church of Hartford and John Woodbridge, Jr. of Killingworth, carried the fight for rule by elder at the synod of 1667 and proved so intractable as to force toleration.[59]

But more important than the Presbyterian victory, was the synod's exposure of the gap between the publicly proclaimed ideals of the colony and the actual beliefs of clergy and brethren; the hypocrisy noted by John Woodbridge, Jr. in his 1670 letter to Richard Baxter. For three decades, lamented Woodbridge, the Connecticut Valley had presented to the world a facade of conformity to a congregational polity. Such was the message of Thomas Hooker's Survey of Church Discipline, the only public statement on polity to come from a Valley minister during the early years, and it was given legal sanction in colony law. But the actual experience of laity and clergy was quite different. From the beginning there was little concensus on church discipline, and, as the years passes, the divisions widened and became more pronounced. Finally, in the 1650's the divisions became public disputes, open sores for all to see. Those disputes worsened in the 1660's to the point where the very fabric of Valley society was in danger of destruction. Against that background the clergy assembled in Hartford in 1667 to try to create a Cambridge Platform for Connecticut. That they met as a synod of the Connecticut churches bore eloquent testimony to the fact that they now felt a common identity separate from their colleagues in Massachusetts. That they failed to agree on a common discipline was a reflection of their own past--and a harbinger of the future.

II

The Revolt of the Brethren: The Valley Churches, 1635-1675

In 1679, after eight years of impatient waiting, the inhabitants of the remote Valley community of Westfield, Massachusetts, considered their town sufficiently strong and stable to support a church. Their minister, Edward Taylor, had joined them in 1671 but, because of a small and relatively impoverished population, the town was prevented from going through the formal procedure of establishing a church. Finally, in the spring of 1679, invitations were sent to churches up and down the Connecticut River to attend organizational ceremonies in June.

However, the people of Westfield faced a rather knotty problem. Their numbers included former inhabitants of communities all over New England--many were church members elsewhere--and, as a result, they were badly divided over the correct procedure for the formation of a church. Each member seemed convinced that the proper way was the way it was done in the area from which he had come. Unfortunately for the community such "ways" seemed to differ radically. Taylor, who kept a chronicle of the dispute in the church records, feared that it might once again prevent the town from having its church. The people wanted a church very badly, he noted, yet the community leaders wanted it to be organized in the traditional manner of the New England churches and feared that if a mistake was made the representatives of neighboring congregations might think badly of the people of Westfield. The problem was to determine what was tradition in the matter and so, in desperation, Taylor was commissioned to contact neighboring churches for advice.[1]

Taylor and his people were dismayed by what they received for the advice was voluminous and the procedures outlined were unbelievably complicated and, unfortunately, often contradictory. The people met in emergency meetings and, after much anguished discussion, adopted a plan which seemed to incorporate the major points found in the advice of neighboring churches and in the beliefs of the Westfield inhabitants. Thus, seven "pillars" were appointed among leading male citizens to be the founding members of the church and a covenant was created to be the cement binding the members together in the ways of Christ. The seven "pillars" polished their narratives of conversion experience and, on a warm June day, the seven "took hold" of the covenant and the church was formed.[2]

The churches of the vicinity extended the right hand of fellowship to the new group but the grumbling among visiting elders was obvious. Solomon Stoddard, the area's most outspoken Presbyterian, spoke disparagingly of church covenants and, as the selected spokesman for the elders, extended the right hand of fellowship in the name of the elders instead of the churches, thus provoking a great outcry from staunch Congregationalists. John Russell of Hadley, dean of the Valley clergy, watched the seven pillars "perform" their moments of conversion--complete with references to blinding lights and strange voices--then stated that it was the most ludicrous display he had ever witnessed and was certainly valid evidence that such public narratives of conversion experience were worthless. Other representatives were so incensed by what they saw and heard that they threatened to walk out and return to the sanity and orthodoxy of their own congregations.

All in all it was a long day for the hopeful people of Westfield. Edward Taylor recorded the bizarre scene in the church record, noting that his people were sorely distressed by the reactions of their guests and assumed that they had committed some grievous error. But Taylor, perhaps expressing the feelings of the majority of townsmen, wrote that his community had waited too long for the event, had already listened to too much well-meant advice, and believed now that if his people were satisfied with the manner in which the church was formed the visiting representatives could say and do what they pleased.[3]

Though the church of Westfield was founded four decades after the first Valley churches its experience was, to a large degree, typical of the beginnings of Hartford, Wethersfield, Windsor, New London, Guilford, and a host of other churches. The people of Westfield wanted to establish a "Congregational" church, yet were uncertain as to how that was to be accomplished. They sought advice from neighboring churches and found, to their surprise, that their own confusion was but a reflection of that of their neighbors. So, in desperation, they relied on their own instincts and the advice of their minister, Edward Taylor, and went ahead with the organization. Not surprisingly, their efforts were severely criticized by neighbors who found some of their practices offensive.

The establishment of Westfield's church contradicts much of what students of early New England have believed about the formation of those early "Congregational" churches. Congregational polity, it is argued, was the natural outgrowth of covenant of "Federal" theology. The nature of that polity was not, by and large, a matter of debate. Its fundamentals were conceived in England and in Europe and implemented in the churches of New England. The settlers of Massachusetts Bay and the Connecticut Valley were non-separatists. They were in agreement on the fundamentals of their polity and their churches reflected that agreement. Later, so the argument goes, New England Congregationalism would come under fire and the polity of the founders would be altered, but those alterations would be forced on the saints by an environment hostile to their exclusiveness and their zeal for purity, not from unresolved conflicts within the ranks.[4]

Yet the founding of the church at Westfield suggests otherwise and a closer inspection of the origins of other Valley churches indicates that Westfield's experience was the rule, not the exception. That the first settlers were generally "Congregational" seems irrefutable but their Congregationalism appears to have been grounded in no common set of beliefs. Instead, one is struck by the obvious lack of uniformity of belief. The churches of the Valley seemed to grow more out of confusion than conformity. Like the good people of Westfield at a later date, the early inhabitants of such places as Windsor seemed unable to determine the correct way in which their churches ought to be organized. Like their ministerial brethren they spoke with many voices--and their confusion found its way into their institutions. The practices of the Congregational church at Wethersfield differed markedly from those of neighboring Hartford. The practices of the Congregational church at Windsor differed from both and Guilford differed from all three. Hartford, for example, was a covenanted congregation from the beginning. Windsor had no church covenant until 1647 and New London saw no need to adopt a covenant until at least 1671.

Guilford required a public "relation of experience" from each prospective member and gave each member a vote on its validity. Hartford required no public relation but relied, instead, on the judgments of Revs. Hooker and Stone. Windsor, at one time or another, utilized both practices.

In only one area of polity did the early churches exhibit any real uniformity; the authority of the clergy. Curiously, in those congregational churches the real power lay with the clergy. It was not, however, an expressed relationship for, in many instances, such as Hooker's tenure in Hartford, it ran counter to the expressed ideals of the minister. Yet, in nearly every fledgeling church it was a fact. The brethren bowed to the will of the minister and followed his advice and counsel--or his command--in nearly every situation. Perhaps it was done out of fear, or love, or merely respect. Perhaps it was simply the reaction of frightened people living in a new, and savage environment, unsure of themselves, confused as to their goals, looking for guidance from men who represented wisdom--and vision. Whatever the reason, it was a reality; a reality which continued from the founding of Hartford in 1636 until the early 1650's.

In no area of congregational life was the minister's authority more important--or more obvious--than in the determination and prosecution of church government. In nearly every church the brethren followed the dictates of the minister in questions of polity, and it was for this reason more than any other that the Valley churches developed such a crazy quilt pattern of "Congregational" polities. Windsor provides an excellent example of a church whose early polity was shaped by ministerial influence, for John Warham's changing notions on discipline were reflected on the oft-altered practices of his church. His willingness to accept "ungodly" persons as members and his hesitancy to endorse the principle of the covenanted congregation were mirrored in the practices of the Windsor church until Hooker's influence over Warham effected change in the late 1640's. Hooker's lecture to the church in 1647 on the necessity of a particular church covenant, for example, caused the church to adopt a covenant some four or five months later. God's people, the new covenant announced, should join together in a particular church covenant "for the managing of discipline and public ordinances of Christ" as well as "to further the spiritual good one of another by example, counsel, admonition, comfort oversighted according to God." This came after the members had "managed" their discipline and "counseled" one another without benefit of a covenant for over a decade.[5]

Moreover, Hooker's beliefs affected the polity of the Windsor church in at least one other respect: the manner of admitting new members. Warham was once quoted as believing in a visible church composed of "a mixed people, godly and openly ungodly"[6] but, under Hooker's tutelage, Warham saw his "error" and became more concerned with the creation of churches excluding the ungodly. In line with this the Windsor church adopted Hooker's notion of a private examination by the elders of all prospective members. In all likelihood this examination incorporated Hooker's method of inquiry as well.[7]

But, as noted in the preceding chapter, Warham's dependence on Hooker did not last beyond the death of the latter in 1647 and the Windsor church dutifully continued to follow their pastor's lead. In 1657 Warham broke with the Hooker tradition and encouraged his church to establish a "Half-Way Covenant," which was done. Then, a few years later, Warham reversed his position and embraced a more rigid Congregationalism by suspending the practice of the "Half-Way Covenant" and endorsing a more restrictive procedure for the admission of new members, one which gave the determining power to the members instead of the elders. It was at this point that Warham's authority and leadership in the Windsor church came to an end and the debate between "Presbyterians" and "Congregationalists" began.[8]

Although few records remain of Thomas Hooker's ministry in Hartford his writings and assorted scraps of evidence suggest that his people adhered to his notions of church discipline and that his eleven year ministry was unmarred by controversy. Recognized by many as one of the ablest divines on either side of the Atlantic, Hooker maintained the love and allegiance of his flock throughout his relatively brief tenure in Hartford. The polity of his church was, as a result, a mirror of his notions of moderate Congregationalism. This meant the acceptance of a church covenant, recognition of the validity and limited authority of church councils, a rather broad interpretation of the nature of a "visible saint," adherence to the doctrine of communion of churches, the rejection of baptism for children of unregenerate parents, and, above all, the maintenance of a careful balance of power between minister and people.[9]

Hooker himself decided the merits of the individual applicants spiritual condition (the church determining his outward holiness); a practice which would have been considered unacceptable in some churches where brethren were given the right to judge the state of the candidate's soul. Moreover, Hooker's interviews with those candidates, consisting of questions designed to probe the individuals motives for particular actions, also would have been unacceptable to some congregations where relations of conversion experience--their time and manner of occurrence--were publicly proclaimed before the membership.[10] Apparently, however, the members of the Hartford church were convinced that the purity of their church was being maintained despite the fact that Hooker's admission requirements were less stringent than those of other churches. "This I am sure of," wrote one of the members, Governor George Wyllys, in 1644, "that with us none are admitted to partake of the seales of the covenant, but such, and their seed, as in the judgement of charity have truth of grace. Which how comfortable it is, you will know when God shall be pleased to bring you to enjoy that mercy.[11]

It would appear that Hooker's dominance over his church contradicted the Congregationalism he espoused. If so, that contradiction was even more apparent elsewhere, particularly in churches embracing a more rigid Congregationalism than was to be found in Hartford. Such a situation existed in Henry Whitefield's Guilford church where doctrine and practice were the epitome of a rigid Congregationalist posture. The church displayed distinct separatist leanings, valued purity of membership above all else, espoused the complete authority of the fraternity, yet was the creation of and obedient servant to its minister. The town viewed itself as a distinct colony and town and church sought communion with no one, least of all those living in the cluster of towns around Hartford. The church, guided by Whitefield, rejected the validity of church councils or the notion of communion of churches, denied that the Church of

England was a "true" church, considered a minister nothing more than a member of the church with special talents, and instituted a highly exclusive admission policy. Yet the church, for all its Congregationalism, did not exert its authority, and Whitefield, though seeing no special authority in his office, governed his church like a Presbyterian elder.[12]

The church of New London displayed a similar disparity between Congregational ideals and ministerial authority, though the early growth of the church produced peculiarities in discipline which made it unlike any other in the Valley and surrounding environs. The church began to function as a church in 1646 though it was not "formed" in the accepted sense of the word. It was not organized around a covenant, did not bother to get the approval of neighboring churches, nor did it see the need to ordain its minister, Richard Blynman. Blynman arrived in the community in 1648 and thus was not the architect of the church's polity, yet he was accepted as the ruler of the church and his authority, at least for a time, was complete.[13]

However, the church had other, more striking, peculiarities in its discipline. A very exclusive and rigid test for membership was adopted in 1646; one which demanded a recitation of the "time and manner" of an individual's conversion before the entire congregation. Yet, though large numbers of people were excluded from the sacraments, no adult in the community was kept from voting in church affairs. The business of the church was conducted during town meeting and no one was excluded from discussion or voting. The only difference between town and church meetings was that, in the latter, the moderator gave way to the minister. Thus, the discrepancy between Blynman's influence and authority and the theoretical power of the brethren was even more striking in New London than in other Valley churches and New London was, apparently, the Valley's only Congregational parish.[14]

For approximately a decade and a half the development of the churches of the Connecticut Valley conformed to the pattern of the churches heretofore described; Hartford, Windsor, Guilford and New London. Though all were avowedly Congregational in theory, in reality their polities differed considerably for in each of these Congregational churches the authority of the minister predominated. Moreover, except for a four year struggle in Wethersfield over "lotts" and assorted ecclesiastical issues, the growth of those infant churches was marked by a real semblance of tranquility. That, however, did not last. In the early 1650's violent disputes erupted in the churches of Wethersfield and Hartford. Soon the fires of contention spread to Windsor, Stratford, New London, and a host of other churches and chasm-like gulfs developed within the memberships and within the communities. Friends turned upon one another with a viciousness heretofore unknown in the communities on or near the Connecticut River. Several churches saw portions of their numbers withdraw from fellowship and either establish rival congregations or go up river to the unsettled areas of western Massachusetts. Few churches or communities escaped the spreading discord, and ministers and magistrates were powerless to stop it. The controversies reached their peak in the late 1660's, then began to taper off, but some churches were still experiencing discord as late as 1680.

What prompted such an abrupt alteration in the history of the religious congregation in the Connecticut Valley is a question lacking a scholarly reply. The only answers are those of the local historians of the nineteenth century who, noting the strife among their ancestors, either minimized its importance or marked it as a reaction to the "Half-Way Covenant" or a sign of the "decline" of New England "Puritanism," or both. However, long before those venerable chroniclers set pen to paper another student of Valley ecclesiastical history suggested a solution more closely conforming to the story which emerges from the records of the period. That "student" was Solomon Stoddard, minister of the First Church of Christ at Northampton, Massachusetts, during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, and a minister well schooled in the ecclesiastical affairs of the Valley.

In the first decade of the eigtheenth century Stoddard debated the merits of his own peculiar "Presbyterianism" with the self-styled paladins of New England Congregationalism--Increase and Cotton Mather. In one of his treatises Stoddard sought to dispel a myth commonly held by many in New England and especially popular among public figures that the country had once been a godly commonwealth of pious men, doctrinal purity, and Congregational orthodoxy but had declined in the middle of the seventeenth century.[15] Piety, so that argument went, had given way to worldliness and orthodoxy had been replaced by dissension. Consequently, God had withdrawn his blessing from his people and, in his absence, New England was besieged by the sowers of discord. The leader of that latter group was, according to the Mathers, Solomon Stoddard.

To defend himself Stoddard attacked the glorification of the piety of the first generation of New Englanders and the whole notion of New England's "decline." The Northampton divine observed that, though he had a high regard for the Founders, he found it difficult to believe that any group of mortals could have attained the level of godliness attributed to them. Rather, he countered, it was his belief that piety among the first settlers had been abysmally low considering the godly nature of their mission. Worldliness, self-interest and greed, he argued, were not the inventions of his own time.

Yet, there was a saintly glow to New England's early years and a high standard of morality to be found among the people. To what was this to be attributed? To the leadership, Stoddard retorted, for the first leaders had, indeed, been godly men. Their counsel had been wise, their lives models of Christian citizenship. They had shown the people the proper path and the people, despite their baseness and ignorance, had been wise enough to follow. But, when those leaders had died, their places had not been filled by equals. The Hookers, Cottons, and Winthrops had been replaced by lesser men; men whose wisdom and counsel was defective. Moreover the people had begun to show their true natures and without the guidance and control of strong and wise men they had grown restless and had begun to pursue their own interests. They had resisted the dictates of their new leaders, had mocked wisdom where it existed, and, in general, had placed their own judgments above those of their leaders or of their God. As the years passed that situation had grown increasingly worse. In 1705, Stoddard concluded, society was disintegrating and it was doing so not because the "people laughed at properly constituted authority and, as a substitute, blithely followed the dictates of their own passions.[16]

Stoddard's analysis was at least partially correct. His basic argument that the church controversies showed the people no longer following their leaders was accurate. Stoddard called such a spirit among the brethren "worldliness"; a loss of interest in the glorification of God. Certainly the persons who had suffered most from that worldliness were the clergy, for, if the disputes showed nothing else, they demonstrated that laymen were no longer being guided by their clerical--or civil--superiors. Certainly, in that sense, the disputes represented a kind of revolution but not for the reason cited by Stoddard. By 1655 many of the "great men" of the Valley of the first generation were dead--most notably Hooker. But many remained: John Warham and Samuel Stone, for example. Yet their churches and communities were among the hardest hit and their stature as pillars of the commonwealth proved an insufficient antidote.

The sources of dissension in the Valley churches and communities can only be found through an analysis of the problems of individual settlements. From such an analysis the observer quickly notices a pattern to the various struggles. Certainly each community had its own peculiar sources of tension; land scarcity, unpopular ministers, recalcitrant laymen, ecclesiastical grievances, dissatisfaction with the allocation of seats in the meeting house, or even a feud over the ownership of animals. Yet, despite the seemingly endless sources of discord one problem was common to every Valley community and fundamental to every dispute; control of the government of the church.

The struggle for ecclesiastical power assumed two forms. In some communities it was symbolized by an attempt by the town meeting to exercise authority over the church. In most communities, however, the real source of dissension came from within the church in the form of an attempt by segments of the membership to wrest ecclesiastical authority from the clergy. Blurring the real nature of the struggle, however, was the form it tended to assume; a debate between competing disciplines. In both types of conflict--town versus church and people versus minister--the arguments espoused were the arguments of Congregationalists versus Presbyterians or Congregationalists versus Congregationalists. The struggle for authority assumed the form of a debate over questions of discipline--baptism, membership requirements, ministerial prerogatives, the legitimacy of councils of elders and the like--all suggesting that the sources of turmoil were the same issues of reformed polity plaguing the clergy.

Yet close inspection of the revolts indicates that the real sources of dissension were institutional, not doctrinal. The struggle for ecclesiastical authority was not, as the clergy assumed, a continuation of the debates of English non-conformists. Rather it was a power struggle generated by contradictions inherent in the institutional structure of those fledgling communities: churches created by towns yet not governed by them and churches whose professed theory was Congregational but whose practices limited congregational power. The Valley ministry, whose letters and church records form the chief source of the modern scholar's knowledge of those struggles, misread the battles in the churches and communities. They called the competing factions "Presbyterians" and "Congregationalists" and assumed that the splits in the laity were but reflections of their own differences over church government. Lamentably, it was only after losing their authority that the clergy recognized the true nature of the revolt, but by then it was much too late.

The controversy between church and town over the town's rights--if any--to meddle in church affairs was a question faced by nearly every fledgling community and was instrumental in precipitating institutional crises in not a few. According to ecclesiastical theorists like Hooker the town meeting had no voice in church government for the civil government's role was protector of the church, not ruler. Its duty was to prevent heresy, to promote peace within and among the churches, and, in general, to foster the growth of religion, but no argument was made for a share of ecclesiastical government. Yet, such a question was germane to the growth of every Valley community. It was perhaps inevitable, for in nearly every settlement the formation of the town antedated the formation of the church. Consequently, for each new town the most pressing questions were, initially, civil: distribution of land, protection against Indians, tax collection, keeping the peace and many more. In general, the success of each settlement depended, to a large extent, on the immediate creation of a smoothly functioning civil government.

Thus, in nearly every instance, by the time the inhabitants came to the formation of a church they were accustomed to meeting together in town meetings to decide questions of mutual interest and were accustomed to electing local officials. They had probably built a meeting house specifically for civil gatherings. Now they were to create a church and it seemed natural to do it within the operating institutions of town government. Hence, as in the case of Westfield, when the inhabitants decided their community was strong enough to support and sustain a church the decision to organize was made in a town meeting as a civil decision. The first minister was selected in the same manner. Thus, intended or not, the Valley settlers established a tradition whereby the church was, from the beginning, the creation of a governmental organization; the town meeting.[17]

The establishment of a church led to immediate problems for in most churches some discrepancy was bound to exist between the membership of the church and the inhabitants of the town. Yet the townsmen, because they had participated in the selection of the minister and the formation of the church, because they attended church services, listened to the minister and paid taxes for support of both church and minister, demanded some voice in the decisions of the church. The extent of that voice varied considerably from town to town. In most communities it meant at least control of decisions governing the meeting house and the right to select clergy. In some communities, however, demands did not stop there. Citizens sometimes sought a voice in matters of discipline as well. The experience of Northampton, founded in 1654, provides an example of such pressure. Upon settlement, the inhabitants of that community immediately organized the apparatus of government and began to hold weekly town meetings, but, as elected officials began to assume more and more functions, the number of meetings fell off sharply to only one every two or three months. Few, if any restrictions were made on participation in the governmental process and every adult male inhabitant was given a voice in the town's decisions.

In 1658 and 1659 the town was stricken by a violent controversy among townsmen over land allotment for a minority of inhabitants were unhappy with their holdings and sought to gain better lots by winning a majority of seats among the selectmen. Their attempt was frustrated by their numbers, yet the squabble had important implications for the formation of the church in 1661. For some time the town had sought a minister. Finally they found an interested applicant in Eleazer Mather of Dorchester, but Mather refused to come unless he was allowed to bring seven or eight Dorchester families with him. Moreover, he demanded that Northampton provide some of its best land for their use. The town reluctantly agreed, though bad feelings were evident among many of the inhabitants, particularly those who had so recently sought better lands for themselves. The town decided that each inhabitant would give up a portion of his holdings to the newcomers though several residents adamantly refused and at least one, Edward Elmer, who had led the fight to gain control of the board of selectmen, was brought to trial.[18]

The church was thus formed on a foundation of bad feeling toward Mather and those accompanying him, a feeling enhanced by the highly selective membership policy adopted by the church at Mather's instigation. All applicants were forced to give a relation of their conversion experience before the brethren and were quizzed extensively by individual members.[19] That process excluded a majority of townsmen from the church estate and, by 1668, the year of Mather's death, less than half of the community's eligible adults were members.[20]

The resulting tension in the community was immense. When the Synod of 1662 endorsed the Half-Way Covenant elements within the church, and a larger number of townspeople, saw it as a means of enlarging the church to include many persons previously excluded and began to urge its adoption. Eleazer Mather's adamant opposition prevented its adoption but pressure from the town continued and, finally, in 1668, with Eleazer bedridden by a severe illness, the church relented and adopted the covenant.[21]

Although in Northampton feuding between town and church did not bring about the disruption of either, other communities were not so fortunate. In Wethersfield a dispute between town and church--with origins in the early days of the town's settlement--led to the dissolution of the church in the 1660's. Much of the story was outlined in the preceding chapter. Friction arose between civil and ecclesiastical institution in the late 1640's in a dispute which revolved around the attitudes of the minister, Henry Smith, and concerned questions of discipline and land allotment. No attempt, however, was made by the town to interfere formally in the activities of the church until a decade later during the ministry of John Russell and the results were disastrous for the small community.

As was noted earlier Russell's conception of the minister's authority was more "Presbyterian" than "Congregational" and most of his laymen appeared to support his notions. However, throughout the early 1650's some of Russell's ecclesiastical notions came under attack from the community at-large, with some townsmen making an attempt to have the General Court order his removal as early as 1650.[22] The dispute became a crisis in 1656 when Russell excommunicated Lt. John Hollister for certain alleged slanderous remarks by the latter against the former. Hollister took his case to the town meeting which supported his attacks on the supposed "Presbyterianism" of Russell and his church. Curiously, the town clamored for a more rigidly Congregational polity, including an admission procedure firmly rooted in a test of religious experience and a general enlargement of the decisive power of the brotherhood, particularly in cases of censure and excommunication. All but five of the church's members supported Russell's position and continued to do so until 1658 when the heat of the controversy forced the minister and his supporters to leave the community.[23]

The experience of the people of Wethersfield was repeated in New London. For about a decade after that church's formation, town and church lived happily under the direction of the first minister, Richard Blynman. As was noted earlier the New London church was virtually a "community" church in the sense that all townsmen were given an equal voice in church government; the government of the church being little more than an extension of the town meeting. Almost no attempt was made to distinguish between church members and non-members in the community except in the celebration of the Lords Supper which was offered only to persons who had made a "confession."[24] However, even that requirement was blurred by the presence in the community of many persons who were church members in other places, including England, and who were allowed to participate in the celebration of the ordinances without prior "confession."

In 1657 Blynman attended the synod of elders held at Boston between the representatives of the churches of Massachusetts and Connecticut. The major product of that synod was the endorsement of a "half-way" covenant, but for Blynman, the significance of the meeting was the opportunity to talk with other clergy and learn of their situations. Blynman returned to New London convinced that his own community church was improperly constituted. In particular he felt the church should be a separate entity within the community with its own government and a carefully restricted membership. Subsequently, Blynman read the results of the synod to his congregation and announced his conviction that many of the practices of New London were in total variance with other communities and had to be changed.

Many listeners were angered by what they heard and Blynman was told that if he attempted to implement the proposals the town would refuse to pay his salary. That statement, in turn, aroused the minister's ire and in a huff he informed his listeners of his intention to leave the community. The town then hastily met and urged him to stay. Blynman agreed but refused to alter his plans to reform the church's polity and to make its membership and government separate from that of the community at-large. His sermons became thinly veiled attacks on those who opposed him. In one he argued that the New London church was much too lax in its membership requirements and was in danger of becoming more so if greater effort was not expended to maintain "purity." In particular he mentioned as sources of impurity "men pressing to come into the church, children of the church pressing to come in without a confession, children of the church challenging their right from their grand-father's covenant," and "in the imperious members of other churches, in pressing the use of the ordinances."[25]

The statement struck a raw nerve among many who listened and one member, Jonathan Brewster, a leader of both church and town, stood and denounced Blynman, arguing that the church's problems came not from others "but from ourselves." Blynman, however, was not to be denied and at his instigation the church voted "to have noe publick communion with members of other churches, in either of the dealles, except dismissed to them," which meant that many present members--not members of the New London church but members elsewhere--were to be cast out until such time as they attained letters of dismissal from their old churches.[26]

A furor ensued in the town. Brewster, writing to John Winthrop, Jr., said that Blynman acted in a "way episcopall and tiranicial" and had alienated much of the town. The church, on the other hand, acted in a manner designed to "hinder the growth of church and town." Brewster continued that, not wanting to be "noe means to hinder the growth of Church and Town," he had called a town meeting to discuss the action. Blynman attended the meeting and told the assembled townsmen that unless they conformed to his views he would accept the invitation of another church to become its minister. The town refused and Blynman subsequently departed.[27]

The controversies in Wethersfield and New London were illustrative of the two primary issues causing friction in the churches and towns of the Valley; the struggles between town and church and minister and brethren. Both were clearly struggles for power. In Wethersfield the latter was conditioned by the former but in most communities--like New London--the reverse was true. The ultimate source of discord was a struggle for power between clergy and people; a struggle which tended to assume the form of a debate between adherents of Congregationalist and Presbyterian polities. From this basic disagreement came a number of secondary issues; the validity of church councils or consociations, the definition of a "visible saint" and the proper standards for the admission of new members, the limits of baptism, the validity of "covenanted" membership and the whole matter of the "Half-Way Covenant." They were the same issues exercising the clergy at the same time, but in the context of the congregations they had no existence of their own but were by-products of the more elemental struggle over the power of the clergy.

In the ecclesiastical struggles of the Valley clergymen were not, however, without friends and supporters, and in some instances a majority of laymen sided with them. Nor were clergymen--as in New London--always associated with a Presbyterian position. Yet, nonetheless, the basic issue remained ministerial power _viz_-_a_-_viz_ the power of the fraternity and in nearly every church Solomon Stoddard's observation concerning the decline of ministerial authority and prestige was a fact. No matter which side emerged victorious--Congregational or Presbyterian--the minister lost. In a land which had always publicly proclaimed the glories of congregational polity the "power of the fraternity" finally became a reality, even when, upon occasion, its avowed purpose was the establishment of "Presbyterianism."

Nowhere was this process more evident than in the tribulations of the First Church of Hartford, the most respected of the Valley churches and the site of the most bitter squabbling. In Hartford the issues were clearly disciplinary in nature and their origins obviously to be found within the confines of the membership. Each of the two factions attacked the status quo; that is, each sought to alter the polity of the church as established under the tutelage of Thomas Hooker. The issues debated were many, but three stood out in importance; the nature and extent of the relative authority of minister and people, the requirements for church membership, and the subjects of baptism. The majority faction was called the "Presbyterian party" and rallied around Hooker's successor and former colleague, Samuel Stone. The minority adopted the standard of rigid Congregationalism and rallied around the ruling elder, William Goodwin, and included several of the leading persons of the town and the colony, including the colonial governor, John Webster.

The dispute began soon after Hooker's death in 1647 when elements of the congregation began to oppose Stone for what they considered his disregard for the wishes of the brethren in matters of church government. Soon the dispute took a new tack when the dissidents, themselves, began to seek change by demanding a greater voice in church affairs as well as a more rigid test for admission; one which would include a narrative of the "time and manner" of the applicant's conversion experience and would subject the applicant to scrutiny by the brethren rather than the elders. In the early 1650's Stone wrote his treatise on membership in which he attacked the dissenters' position and suggested an alternative which, if adopted, would have altered Hartford's practice to one of accepting little more than a simple profession of faith. It was this paper which evidently prompted Elder Goodwin's public denunciation of Stone in 1655 or 1656.[28]

The church's problems gained public notice in 1656 when Michael Wigglesworth was invited to come and preach to the church as a candidate for Hooker's vacancy. Wigglesworth spent a short time on trial and, after his departure, the members met to decide whether or not to ask him to settle permanently in the community. However, before the matter could be discussed, Stone announced that he would not accept Wigglesworth and that, moreover, he would not even allow the church to vote on the question. His reasons for opposition are unclear but his action precipitated a crisis in his church. Protests from certain laymen were so vociferous that the General Court intervened and asked a council of neighboring ministers to come to Hartford to settle the matter.[29]

The council met in the middle of 1656, listened to both sides, and, after considering questions involving far more than the mere issue of Wigglesworth's candidacy, decided in favor of the dissenters and urged Stone to desist from the practices and doctrines which his opponents found so objectionable. But Stone, who had a majority of his church behind him, rejected the council's advice, claiming that his position was not given a fair hearing.[30] His words may have contained some truth for at least four influential members of the General Court--Gov. Webster, Deputy-governor Wells, magistrates Cullick and Talcott--were from Hartford, were members of the church, and were outspoken critics of Stone.[31] What specific questions the council debated are unknown, but a hint is provided by a statement from one of its members, John Higginson of Guilford, who in testimony before a later council, delivered a blistering attack against the Hartford divine, blaming his intransigence and his exalted conception of his own authority for the council's failure to settle the controversy. Higginson reported that it had been the council's duty to find either an acceptable solution or to allow the dissenter to leave the church. He felt they had found a solution in the censure of Stone. However, Stone's subsequent refusal to accept the decision, Higginson concluded, "hath bene the blameable cause of the continuance and increase and multiplying of those contentions and disorders that have bene since the Counsell...a wound to the congregational way."[32]

The opposition of the Hartford majority to the council's decision created an intolerable situation for the once beloved and respected Stone. Personal vilification was intense and came not only from within his church but from "friends" like Higginson in other towns in the Valley. Consequently, the aging minister resigned his pastorate and headed for Boston a broken and embittered man. Upon his arrival a number of his old friends sought to mediate on his behalf and five of them, John Wilson, Richard Mather, Samuel Whiting, John Sherman and John Norton, wrote to the leaders of the dissenters, John Cullick and William Goodwin, asking for a summary of the issues involved and some inkling as to what could be done to resolve the tragic situation. At the same time a number of Massachusetts churches wrote a letter to the Hartford church condemning it for allowing the dispute to continue and warning that the issues raised were of such a volatile nature that if the matter was not settled quickly the disorder might engulf all of New England.[33]

The dissenters' reply was full of bitterness and indicated they had no desire to stay in Hartford with or without Stone as their pastor. The letter showed clearly that the dispute went much deeper than the mere personality of Samuel Stone. Cullick and Goodwin politely informed the Bay ministers to tend their own flocks, that nothing they could say or do could possibly heal the breach, that they wanted complete adherence to the Council's decision or they wanted dismissal. "No, Brethren," they concluded, "we know no rule warranting us to grant your request, neither doe you shew us any, if we understand your meaning;...we doe beseech and entreat you to yield to that councell that is already given; either in the first part of it which would be matter of great rejoicing and comfort to our hearts...or else that you would in like tenderness towards us graunt us our dismission."[34]

The "first matter" mentioned by the dissenters might have been Wigglesworth's candidacy. Yet the dispute obviously went much deeper than the qualifications of a young minister. Certainly, much of the debate focused on the question of whether Stone had the right to select his own colleague or whether that function was the prerogative of the membership. Benjamin Trumbull, Connecticut's venerable historian, suggested that, as in other communities, the real issue was one of the respective rights of church and town.[35] But there is no mention of the town in the records of the Hartford controversy. The combatants seemed to have all been church members.

In addition to the question of the power of the minister the dissenters were agitated by Stone's desire to broaden the membership of the church by loosening membership requirements. Such was certainly the thrust of his earlier paper on the subject and was, no doubt, a matter of real concern to the council of ministers. In a 1666 letter to John Winthrop, Jr., John Davenport of New Haven surveyed the bitter controversies then searing the Valley churches and attributed much of the contention to those seeking a "parish way" of church organization.[36] Certainly in Hartford, the source of the disputes, Stone's position of membership--and that of his followers--would have, indeed, created a kind of "parish way."

While Stone remained in Boston the Connecticut General Court invited a number of Bay minister, including the five aforementioned letter writers, to come to Hartford to seek a solution. They came in early 1657 and were welcomed by the political and ecclesiastical leaders of Connecticut but not by the warring Hartford factions who were united on at least one point: that a visit by Massachusetts clergy was unwarranted and unnecessary (a belief shared by John Higginson and other Valley ministers as well).[37] Nonetheless the visitors met with some success. Their decision favored Stone's position, not a surprise since most were his personal friends. But they were able to effect a compromise only after they produced a letter from Stone in which he assumed personal responsibility for the entire affair. He had made serious errors in judgment, he admitted, and had he been wiser he would not have blocked the vote on Wigglesworth but would "have been willing to have left the church (had they desired it) to their liberty in voting."[38]

The question of Stone's resignation remained unsettled, however. By vote, a majority of Hartford's members indicated a desire for his return, but Stone, who had magnanimously accepted guilt in order to heal the rift, showed no such magnanimity where his future was concerned. He obviously desired no more vilification of his character or ability and he informed the church that he would return only if all members agreed to certain propositions. Foremost, he wrote, the church must submit to every doctrine propounded by him, a hint to the ideological nature of the struggle. Second, the church would not hire an assistant unacceptable to him but would give him the liberty to find a colleague on his own. He concluded by citing his weariness with the situation and by indicating a singular lack of enthusiasm about returning. "I am utterly unable to act those great and difficult matters of church government which must be attended with you; my judgment may also in some things be different from yours, which may be a cause of future breach..."[39] After considerable debate the church accepted his terms with the stipulation that it be allowed some voice in matters of doctrine as well as a voice in the choice of his associate:

> Proposition: The Church of Christ at Hartford doe bynde themselves in the presence of God to Samuel Stone their teacher, to submitt toe every doctrine which he shall propound to them, grounded upon the sacred Scriptures, and confirmed by such reasons from the work of God, that noe man is able to gainsay. And Samuell Stone byndes himself to attend any reason which shall be presented toe him by any brother of the church or any man who shall offer himselfe to dispute with him, and thearby bring any of his doctrine to publique tryall.
>
> Proposition: The Church doe bynde themselves not toe offer toe induce or bring in any officer to joyn with Samuell Stone against his will and right reason, and without his consent and approbation.[40]

But, after tentatively agreeing to Stone's resettlement, the dissenting brethren withdrew from the church as soon as Stone returned to his pulpit. That act created a furor in the General Court for it threatened the very fabric of Valley society. Controversies were appearing in churches up and down the river and, if dissenters were allowed to withdraw and leave their communities, churches and towns would be in danger of imminent collapse. The Court reacted quickly to the new situation, demanding that representatives of the two sides in Hartford appear at the May, 1658, Court session. In addition laws were quickly passed making the creation of a new church without the consent of the Court and neighboring congregations an illegal act and also outlawing any "ministry or church administration... contrary to that dispensed by the settled and approved ministry."[41]

In May the court met with the two Hartford factions but accomplished nothing. The stumbling block to peace was Samuel Stone who, in the words of Benjamin Trumbull, viewed "the withdrawn brethren as in the hands of the church at Hartford, and the matters to be determined as not lying within any council of the General Court." At the same session Stone filed a petition with the Court against the dissenters, charging them with illegally withdrawing from communion and challenging one or two of their number to meet him in a public debate of the issues.[42]

While those events progressed the dissenters resided in Wethersfield, communing with the aggrieved brethren of that community. In December, 1657, they wrote to John Davenport of New Haven and to New Haven's governor, Theophilus Eaton, outlining their plight and asking for their help. Their withdrawal, they wrote, resulted from the conditions Stone demanded of the church as the price of his return. They could not, they asserted, stand idly by and allow Stone full power in matters of doctrine and practice. His demand that membership requirements be loosened was in opposition to everything in which they believed. "Wee have now sent you a coppie of Mr. Stone's letter," they wrote, "wherein you will see the tearms propounded of return, which wee cannott accept, in regard to the offences wee have declared they lye under in our consciences, and they doe nothing for the removall of them...but the truth is, wee have no small cause to feare that the Church will be filled quickly with such persons as we cannott close with in such a relation and way of indeared communion."[43]

Davenport and Eaton responded through a letter from the New Haven General Court to its counterpart in Connecticut. The letter avoided mentioning names but denounced those in Connecticut who sought "alterations in civil government and church discipline." The New Haven Court made it plain that they were frightened and outraged by what was taking place in their sister colony and reminded their Connecticut brethren that "their civil polity and laws" were based "upon the divine word, and as the leaders and churches had gathered and received their discipline from the same they would exert themselves to preserve them inviolable."[44]

This thinly veiled threat from New Haven was ignored by the Connecticut Court for more pressing matters demanded attention. The Hartford church was shattered, and many of the inhabitants had left the community. In desperation the Court turned again to the Massachusetts clergy, hoping that a resumption of the council of ministers from the Bay might yield a solution. For a change, Samuel Stone proved amenable and signified the church's approval. The Court hesitated, however, awaiting the outcome of its May meeting with the two factions but when that ended in disaster an invitation was extended to the Massachusetts clergy to form a council.[45]

The council seemed doomed to failure. Thirty-three of the Hartford dissenters were then preparing to join the migration of people from Wethersfield under John Russell in a trek up the Connecticut River into western Massachusetts. Included among the thirty-three were some of the most distinguished Hartford residents: Elder William Goodwin, magistrate John Cullick, former colonial governor Webster, and Thomas Hooker's son Samuel, later to be minister at Farmington.[46] Nonetheless, a few of the dissenters were remaining in Hartford and the Court evidently felt that some kind of settlement was essential. It was considered necessary to obtain agreement on the issues involved for those issues were creating difficulties in other churches as well. If a portion of the Hartford dissidents could be brought back into the fold then perhaps that agreement could be used as a basis for settlement in other communities. Moreover, the Court considered the withdrawal of the Hartford brethren an immeasurably dangerous precedent and wanted the declaration of an ecclesiastical tribunal to support its own pronouncements. To the

Court's relief, the Bay clergy agreed to hold a new council, though they stipulated that it was to be held in Boston, not Hartford. One trip to Connecticut was obviously enough.[47]

The council, consisting of the ministers of Boston, Cambridge, Charlestown, Ipswich, Dedham, and Sudbury, met from June 15 to August 19, 1659, and was attended also by representatives of the rival Hartford factions. The issues discussed were many and varied. Benjamin Trumbull, viewing documents of the meeting no longer accessible, discussed the proceedings in the following terms:

> Nothing...is more evident from the questions propounded, which it appears were drawn by the very heads of the parties, and by the gentlemen chosen by the disaffected brethren, and rejected by the church, than that the whole controversy respected the qualifications for baptism, church membership, and the rights of the brotherhood...[48]

Yet, when the Council's decision was made public in October, no mention was made of any of those issues. Instead, the council confined its comments to the assignation of guilt for the failure of the compromise of 1657. Not surprisingly, the dissenters were blamed for the dissolution of the church. Their withdrawal, not Stone's "proposals," was cited as the reason for the failure of the 1657 agreement. Moreover, the Council condemned the dissenters' withdrawal as being without ecclesiastical justification, an act which, no doubt, brought joy to the Connecticut General Court.[49]

Samuel Stone, however, did not escape unscathed. Many of his actions were condemned as not consistent with the scope--and authority--of a Congregational minister. Commenting on Stone's role in the whole affair, Trumbull wrote that the Hartford minister's "Congregationalism" more resembled Presbyterianism, "that he defined true congregationalism as a speaking Aristocracy in the face of a silent Democracy."[50] But Stone was certainly not alone in holding that view. It was the assumption of nearly every minister who served a congregation in the Valley's first years. The clergy, regardless of ecclesiastical persuasion, was accustomed to guiding and ruling the people and, heretofore, the people had accepted that situation. Stone, in speaking out against Wigglesworth or on behalf of a more lenient test for church membership, was merely exercising his traditional authority. For the first time, however, that authority was challenged by a significant number of laymen. That was the real root of the Hartford controversy and it went largely unnoticed by the Massachusetts clergy in their decision. Yet it was not unnoticed in other Valley communities and would be a source of discord for decades to come.

The Council's decision, accepted by the Hartford church as well as by the few remaining dissenters, was met by public rejoicing in Connecticut. The General

Court proclaimed a day of thanksgiving for the settlement and for a bountiful harvest.[51] But events proved that thanksgiving a bit premature, for other churches were even then having similar problems and more would follow. The struggle for ecclesiastical authority in the Hartford church was being repeated in churches up and down the Connecticut River, Nor was the Hartford church to know any extended period of tranquility for within four years the battle lines would again be drawn. Benjamin Trumbull attributed such mushrooming difficulties to a debate over church polity, to the existence of

> a strong party...who were for admitting all persons of a regular life to a full communion in the churches, upon their making a profession of the christian religion, without any inquiry with respect to a change of heart; and for treating all baptized persons as members of the church. Some carried the affair still further, and insisted that all persons, who had been members of churches in England, or had been members of regular ecclesiastical parishes there, and supported the public worship, should be allowed to enjoy the privileges of members in full communion in the churches of Connecticut. They also insisted that all baptized persons, upon owning the covenant, as it was called, should have their children baptized, though they came not to the Lord's table.[52]

Certainly what Trumbull wrote was accurate. Such questions were fundamental to the church's problems. Yet the lesson of the Hartford controversy was clear. The source of most difficulties was not so much what practices would be adopted as the question of who would make the decision--elders or brethren. That was the essence of the traditional division between

Congregationalists and Presbyterians and it was the source of division in the infant churches of the Valley.

The Hartford church remained at peace until 1664. In 1660 church and minister made an obvious attempt to mollify dissident elements in the congregation by hiring as Stone's assistant a youthful minister, former resident of Hartford, and moderate Congregationalist, John Whiting.[53] Then, in 1663, the aged Stone died and his place was taken by another young minister--and true Presbyterian--John Haynes, late of Wethersfield. Again the church became embroiled in controversy and the issues were the same as before. Haynes attempted to make alterations in baptismal procedures. Large elements of the church protested the change and, more important, rejected the minister's right to make such changes unilaterally. In a letter to John Winthrop, Jr. in 1666, John Davenport of New Haven explained the new difficulties as an uprising of the "Presbyterian faction" in the church. Referring to Haynes' innovations he wrote that Hooker "would have decryed the baptizing of Adopted children, by their Adoptants right: most of all, the baptizing of servants borne in the house, or bought with monie...But he is at rest and the people their are woefully divided, and the better sorte are exceedingly grieved, while the looser and worser party insult, hoping that it will be as they would have it, viz., that the plantacions shall be brought into a parish-way..."[54] The dispute quickly extended beyond the bounds of baptismal procedures and soon encompassed all the old questions which had divided "Congregationalists" and "Presbyterians" in Hartford. It became obvious to all that the council of 1659 had, in reality, accomplished nothing.[55]

The bitterness of the new struggle was greatly heightened by the activities of the two ministers. Whiting gained public notice and started a lively controversy when, in 1666 he denied membership to a number of families professing loyalty to the Church of England and demanding admission to the Hartford church on the basis of their membership in the Church of England.[56] Whiting met with them in November, 1666, and talked with William Pitkin, their spokesman, about the group's interest in membership. "My answer was I did desire to know upon what account they desired that communion," Whiting later wrote. "Whether upon account of any union they had already with the church of Hartford or an union they should have by joining to it." William Pitkin answered "they did desire it upon account of a union they had already (being in covenant or church members) but if anything further were required by rule they would attend it. Whereunto I returned answer that I knew no such union they had to the Church of Hartford as to entitle them to communion in all the ordinances of Christ, but however that I would consider of their motion and give them further answer in some convenient time."[57] Whiting denied their motion, the issue went to the General Court, and Whiting later drew a rebuke from the Court.

Haynes, on the other hand, was spreading Presbyterian doctrines in the Valley. He was instrumental in bringing about the 1667 synod and played a leading role in that meeting. When the strength of the Presbyterian party became known, three Congregationalists of various hues--Whiting, Samuel Hooker (of Farmington and formerly one of the Hartford dissenters) and John Warham--sought to counter their influence by opening the meeting to members of the Massachusetts clergy. When this failed the Congregationalists went home, though Haynes led a successful fight to get General Court approval for a resumption of the synod. However, no further meetings took place.[58]

By 1668, as the General Court sought to solve the doctrinal splits between Congregationalist and Presbyterians by toleration of all persons "approved according to lawe, orthodox and sowned in the fundamentalls of Christian religion,"[59] the new Hartford dispute had proceeded almost to the point of violence. In conformity with the toleration act a hastily formed ecclesiastical council suggested that Haynes' group withdraw and establish a Presbyterian church. But Haynes' followers represented the majority and, instead, Whiting's followers petitioned the General Court for the right to withdraw. The Court ordered the Hartford church either to allow the dissenters to "walke distinct, according to such their Congregationall principles," or to allow them to withdraw.[60] The majority preferred withdrawal to a continuation of the bitterness, and, in 1670, thirty persons formed the second church of Hartford. After formal organization they issued a public statement describing the discipline of their church. They went to great lengths to announce to the world they believed "visible saints are the only fit matter, and confederation the form, of a visible church." They also endorsed the Half-Way Covenant, a fact suggesting that that practice was not one of the issues separating them from their former brethren. Above all, they announced that theirs was to be a "Congregational" church; one in which ruling authority was in the hands of the brethren.[61]

While the problems of Hartford found solution in the formation of distinct churches the situation in Wethersfield only became more confused. The town had, in the name of Congregationalism, scored a crushing victory over the established church with the removal of John Russell and his followers--including the Hartford dissenters--in 1658. The town had gained control of the church and was able to shape its polity in whatever fashion in desired, yet was unable to do so. A decade later John Woodbridge, Jr. of Killingworth would report to Richard Baxter that Wethersfield's church, under the ministry of Gershom Bulkeley, was a Presbyterian church. How this came about is not known. Nor do the records reveal the amount of strife that must have been generated by the transformation. All that is known is that a new church was formed by the town in 1659 and a minister hired. The minister was John Cotton, Jr., son of the famous Boston divine and a Congregationalist. Cotton did not remain long, however, and in 1663 his place was taken by another young minister, John Haynes, soon to be leader of the Presbyterian faction in Hartford. For the next several years a succession of young divines occupied the Wethersfield pulpit until, in 1667, Gershom Bulkeley happily left New London to answer Wethersfield's call. Four years later Woodbridge informed Baxter that the church was a parish church firmly controlled by the elders. However, the real issue in Wethersfield had always been the power struggle between church and town and, in reality, the institution of Presbyterian government did not alter the significance of the town's earlier victory. Bulkeley might have controlled the church but the town controlled Bulkeley.[62]

The problems of the community of Stratford assumed a different form from those of either Hartford or Wethersfield yet the basic issues were the same. However, none of the factions in that community were Presbyterian. The catalyst for strife was the Half-Way Covenant and, apparently, no other issue. The controversy developed around the desire of persons both within and without the church to see the adoption of a half-way status. Yet, as in every Connecticut community affected by strife, Stratford's dispute soon became a challenge to instituted ecclesiastical authority and resulted in an alteration of that authority and a decline of the minister's power and prestige. Moreover, though Stratford's dispute was not simply between church and town, the power of the church declined as well.

The dispute started with the death of the church's original minister, a Mr. Blackman, in 1663. Blackman was primarily responsible for the nature of the church's polity and had served his people for many years in relative tranquility. As his successor the church selected Israel Chauncey, son of Harvard President Charles Chauncey. Because of Chauncey's opposition to the Half-Way Covenant many members objected to his settlement but to no avail.[63] Yet the dispute did not become heated until shortly after Chauncey's ordination when the town received a number of new settlers--probably from England--who immediately sought admission to the church. However, the church refused their request on the grounds that, though they professed to be Independents and members of other churches, they were suspected of being adherents to the Half-Way Covenant. The newcomers immediately replied that their request could not be denied without at least an examination by the minister but the church argued that theirs was a "closed society," a comment shedding considerable light on the sort of Congregationalism to which the majority of the church adhered. It was the members' belief that the right to an examination was the church's decision, not the applicants. "And whereas you apprehend you have equall right with our selves in all the ordinances of Christ in this place," the church announced, "these may certifie you at present that we are of a different apprehension from you in that matter."[64]

The newcomers then sought permission from the town to form a new church and were granted that right. Their efforts were aided by dissidents from the established church who were antagonistic toward Chauncey and not in agreement with the isolationist impulses of the members. Not surprisingly, relations between the two churches were less than cordial. The fledgling congregation, through the action of the town, obtained the services of a young minister, Peter Bulkeley, brother to Presbyterian Gershom. But Peter, perhaps not wanting to become involved with a church whose future was so uncertain, soon departed and his place was taken by another young minister named Zechariah Walker, whose adherence to the Half-Way Covenant was well known.[65]

For a time the two groups, by order of the town, shared the same meeting house and tried to hold separate services and stay out of one another's way. But one Sunday in early 1669 Walker's services lasted three hours, forcing the members of the older church to wait outside. They were furious and removed to the home of one of the members where they voted unanimously that the new church would use the meeting house no longer. The following Sunday when Walker's group arrived for services they found the building boarded and they too retired to a member's home to plan strategy.

The matter then went to the General Court with the new church petitioning for the right to use the meeting house and the old church petitioning to deny them that right. The Court met the problem by calling a council of ministers but the old church refused to submit to a council, arguing that the dispute concerned no ecclesiastical issues, only the use of the meeting house. There the matter rested until September, 1669, when the old church reversed its position and sent a note to the new church suggesting that if they believed some ecclesiastical differences separated them why not submit their problems to an ecclesiastical council then meeting in New London. The new church agreed but the journey to New London brought no results. Finally, after years of fighting, Governor John Winthrop intervened and suggested that the new church move elsewhere whereupon, in 1674, Walker took his group to Woodbury.[66]

Like Stratford, Windsor's troubles also stemmed from a dispute over the Half-Way Covenant although, as in Stratford, the real issue proved to be a struggle for ecclesiastical authority. Windsor's problems, already discussed at length, stemmed mainly from John Warham's changing views on discipline, culminating in 1664 in his announcement to his church that he "had meete with such arguments against the practice concerning the baptising of members children...and could not goe one in practice as hee had done without scrupil of conscience...not that he intended to cast off the practice holy, but onely laye it for a time till he could be better able to answer his present scruples."[67]

For three years the aged Warham battled his conscience as well as embittered members of his congregation. Finally, bed-ridded by disease, he suggested the church hire an assistant minister to perform duties no longer within his power. The factions haggled over first one man and then another until a majority settled on Nathaniel Chauncey, brother of Israel of Stratford. The debate over Chauncey developed into a test of strength between pro and anti-Warham forces and became so heated that the General Court was forced to intervene to restore order. On October 19, 1667, the Court ordered "the Towne of Windsor" to meet the following Monday and for "all the freemen and householders within the limits of the sayd town and Massacco are to bring in their votes (for or against Chauncey) to Mr. Henry Wolcott." Chauncey was confirmed, 86 to 52.[68]

Chauncey's first act was to restore the Half-Way Covenant, but that did not quell the dispute. In fact, matters seemed to grow worse. Those who opposed Chauncey withdrew from the church and set out to hire their own minister. They petitioned the Court for such a right, which was granted, and then, after some looking, they settled on Benjamin Woodbridge, son of Massachusetts Presbyterian Rev. John Woodbridge of Newbury and member of a family that would contribute several Presbyterian divines to Valley churches.[69]

The town voted to allow Woodbridge to lecture on the Sabbath and Thursday of every other week. However, that situation proved unsatisfactory to his followers who petitioned the General Court for the right to form a separate church, that Woodbridge "might have freedome for a quiet and perfect settlement amongst us...We have offered Candid and christian Termes of Compliance with those that stand as our opposites," they wrote, "and have yielded so far as we judge, either Peace will command us, or Truth will permit us. Even to walking according to their owne principles. Whereby we grieve that we have some occasion to thinke, that tis not so much our perswasions as our Names that are so offensive."[70] And what was their persuasion? To John Davenport of New Haven they were the "looser and worser party" in Windsor--to Simon Bradstreet of New London they were the "Presbyterian party."[71]

The General Court was unwilling to let the church split permanently without some effort toward reconciliation, so in October, 1668, a council of four ministers--Gershom Bulkeley, Samuel Wakeman, Joseph Fitch, and Joseph Eliot--(the same who six months earlier had recommended toleration for Presbyterians) was asked to look into the Windsor dispute. It did and reported to the Court that no accommodation was possible at that time. Instead, it recommended the creation of a separate church which the Court grudgingly granted.[72]

Other Valley churches experienced similar divisions, though a paucity of material precluded the possibility of concise analysis of issues or factions. Middletown, for example, had a raging controversy at approximately the same time divisions began in Hartford and Wethersfield. In Middletown it was clearly church against minister. The minister in question was the very aged Nathaniel Stow who had served his flock faithfully for many years when suddenly he became the object of their derision. The struggle continued until 1660 when the General Court intervened and dismissed Stow "on account of the evil temper of the people towards him."[73] The church was not, at the time, officially organized as a church (not until 1668) which may have been the source of the dispute. At any rate, Stow was too old to find another position and he was forced to live his last few years in Middletown without any visible means of support.

Fairfield experienced the same split a few years later. Samuel Wakeman was the minister involved. He was considerably younger than Stow but was, nonetheless, driven from his pulpit because of his unpopular views.[74] A similar fate met Gershom Bulkeley of New London in 1666. Hired by the community in 1660 to replace the long departed Richard Blynman, Bulkeley was an avowed Presbyterian and the town knew it. But they took him just the same, though exacting from him a promise that he would not attempt to spread his views. Bulkeley, however, was unable to keep his part of the bargain and, five years later, was asked to leave.[75]

The church struggles of the mid-seventeenth century had a profound impact on the institutional growth of the Connecticut Valley. Above all they upset the traditional patterns of ecclesiastical--and civil--authority. The Valley churches were established as "Congregational" churches, adhering to a polity exalting the "power of the fraternity." Yet the fraternity did not rule. Ecclesiastical authority was, from the beginning, in the hands of the clergy. Ministers shaped the polities of infant churches, pronounced doctrine, and in every way guided their flocks against a wilderness bent on destroying frail communities. The clergy were revered and respected. Though they toiled side by side with their charges, nonetheless, they were viewed as something more than mere mortals.

Then, suddenly, the distance between laity and clergy disappeared and ministerial authority and prestige collapsed under the onslaught of laymen apparently determined to turn the theory of congregational rule into reality. Once revered ministers like Samuel Stone and John Russell were vilified and called Presbyterian innovators for simply trying to exert the kind of leadership expected of the minister only a few years before. Moreover, as the struggles spread through the Valley the clergy had difficulty even maintaining equality with their flocks. In many instances they became little more than pawns of warring factions of laymen; the servants of the churches rather than the masters. They were vilified for expressing unpopular notions, often saw their salaries withheld as punishment, and, occasionally, even experienced dismissal. In every way the power of the minister, once considered inherent in the nature of the office, became the servant and product of the power of the fraternity.

The struggles also significantly altered the relative strengths of civil and ecclesiastical institutions in the Valley towns; a fact which would be a source of tension in those communities for decades to come. In many of the towns, like Wethersfield, the basic issue was whether the church was an autonomous unit or a creation of the town and, hence, subservient to its will. The pattern of town growth tended to support the latter.

Churches, in nearly every instance, came after the establishment of civil rule and were, by and large, creations of the town meetings. With that in mind, townsmen who helped pay ministerial salaries demanded a voice in ecclesiastical government. They demanded a voice in the hiring and firing of clergy. Also, they demanded the right to determine church polity, especially in such matters as membership requirements and baptismal practices.

In every town where townsmen and church members struggled the town emerged triumphant. In Wethersfield the majority of the church left the community. In New London a recalcitrant minister was ousted. In Stratford an obstinate church was circumvented by the creation of a new church. In Northampton, pressure from the town was instrumental in forcing the church to relax membership requirements. The power of the towns proved superior to the power of the churches in every instance.

The fighting in the churches and towns also had an important effect on patterns of authority in the colony of Connecticut as a whole. The clergy, reacting to their inability as individuals to solve their communities' difficulties, sought the strength of numbers. Sensitive to their declining authority in the churches they sought to counter their losses through the power of councils and synods. At first they turned to their Bay brethren for help, but when little was accomplished they organized on their own. Yet councils and synods produced few results. The decisions of the councils were used by the laity as they saw fit--supported if a decision was favorable, ignored if it was not. Clergymen quickly came to realize that their collective authority was no more tangible than their power as individuals.

Nor did the General Court escape the debilitating effects of ecclesiastical strife. The Court, symbol of civil authority, was helpless to end, or to even curb, the struggles. Charged with the duty of preserving domestic tranquility, Court members were singularly unable to fulfill their function and, like their ministerial colleagues, soon discovered that they had little authority other than that which flowed from the good will of the populace--and good will was not much in evidence in the middle of the seventeenth century. The Hartford episode was proof positive of the Court's ineptitude. Faced with a violent controversy a few feet from its chambers the Court was powerless to act effectively. It tried everything short of armed force to quiet the disturbance: moral persuasion, public debate, civil censure, threats, even new laws--yet nothing worked. The good citizens of Hartford sneered at the Court's power and supported its pronouncements only when it was in their interest to do so. Clearly, the attempt to resolve the institutional problems of fledgling communities in a virgin wilderness was bringing a new order of things to the Connecticut Valley.

III

The Search for Mastery: The Valley Clergy, 1670-1690

In the 1650's and 1660's the Valley clergy considered the disputes in the towns and churches as essentially ecclesiastical in nature and largely an extension of its own disagreement over church polity. The ministers were divided into factions of Congregationalists and Presbyterians arguing questions of membership requirements, baptismal practices, ministerial authority and the like and assuming that their flocks were merely imitating their own disagreement. As the disputes spread and grew in bitterness, the clergy was not insensitive to its failure to reach some kind of collective agreement on matters of discipline. Thus, throughout the 1650's and 1660's the ministers' panacea for the upheavals was a settlement of disciplinary problems and, because of their traditional role as leaders of their congregations, they assumed that once they showed unanimity on such questions the brethren would cease squabbling. At first the ministry relied on church councils to settle specific disputes. When that failed, it turned, instead, to the creation of an ecclesiastical constitution for all of Connecticut. Such was the purpose of the synod of 1667 and its failure left the elders in a quandary. As an expedient they recommended toleration hoping to at least quiet the Valley until an acceptable platform of church discipline could be agreed upon. With that in mind the General Court, in May, 1669, granted toleration to Presbyterianism in a proclamation stating, in part, that:

> This Court haveing seriously considered the great divisions that arise amongst us about matters of Church government, for the honor of God, well fare of the churches and preservation of the publique peace so greatly hazarded, doe declare that whereas the Congregationall Churches in these partes for the generall of their profession and practice have hitherto been approved, we can doe no less than still approve and countenance the same to be without disturbance untill better light in an orderly way doth appear; but yet forasmuch as sundry persons of which for prudence and piety amongst us are otherwise perswaaed (whose wellfare and peaceable satisfaction we desire to accomadate,) this Court doth declare that all such persons being allso approved according to lawe as orthodox and sound in the fundamentalls of Christian religion may have allowance of their persuasion and profession in church ways or assemblies without disturbance.[1]

But toleration did not end the controversies nor, conversely, did it result in the establishment of hordes of Presbyterian churches. Some disputes, like the one in Hartford, did find solution but not so much because of toleration as from the exhaustion of the combatants. Moreover, after the "Congregational party" withdrew from the Hartford church in 1670 to establish its own church, the "Presbyterian party" failed to capitalize on its opportunity to establish a Presbyterian church.[2] As a result, some elements of the Valley ministry began to re-evaluate the upheavals in the churches and towns and to rethink old notions concerning the sources of dissension. Were the disputes really the product of unresolved ecclesiastical questions? Was the clergy to blame because of its failure to establish an ecclesiastical constitution? Had toleration failed to bring peace? The ministers considered these questions and others. They wanted to place the blame on questions of discipline yet they could not, for they could not remove from their minds the feeling that something was fundamentally wrong with Valley society; something much more serious than simple arguments between Presbyterians and Congregationalists. The conduct of the people during the disputes had been barbarous. They had rebuked established authority, both civil and ecclesiastical, and had risked anarchy in the process. They had shown contempt for one another when brotherly love and affection were supposed to be the cornerstones of New England society. Finally, they had exhibited a total disregard for the common good and had pursued selfish private interests even when such pursuance threatened the very existence of the community.

The clergy had a word to describe such behavior--worldliness--and it ran counter to all the values of the Christian commonwealth. Order, harmony, respect for properly constituted authority, pursuance of the common good: these were the virtues of the right-ordered society, the virtues upon which New England society was founded. Obviously a new spirit had arisen among the people and it was this spirit, not ecclesiastical discipline, which had provided the impetus for the people's discontent. Ecclesiastical problems had merely been the vehicle for rebellion--not the cause. The clergy's analysis, as well as that of the civil administration, had been in error for no abstract principles of church government motivated the brethren. They were in revolt against the most fundamental values of the society and if allowed to succeed the society would crumble.

The realization of that fact was a profound psychic shock for the ministry for it explained why they had so quickly fallen from former positions of respect and authority. It was meant to happen. The people had lashed out at all forms of authority and, in the case of the ministry, had succeeded in destroying it. The clergy was the obvious symbol of the status quo and, at the same time, the most accessible to the people. Little wonder then that popular tendencies toward mob-rule and herd-like action had fallen heaviest on the clergy. The ministers were the promoters of the common good in the community; the preachers of subservience of private interest to the good of the whole. They had tried to maintain that standard during the disputes and had been punished for their efforts. They had sacrificed their own interests, their own beliefs, and, in some cases, their livelihoods, in an attempt to restore peace. But their flocks had shown no such selflessness. No respect was given the ministerial position, no reverence accorded its learning or wisdom, no fear shown for the power it purported to represent. The minister's authority was undermined and overturned; the values he supported trampled; and all in the name of private interest. To a lesser extent, civil authority had shared the same fate.

The ministers concluded that, though they had not previously realized it, the real issue underlying the struggles was a quest for power. The people were rejecting the holy purpose of their errand into the wilderness and the authority which supported that errand, and were demanding control and direction of their own affairs. The clergy interpreted such a state of affairs in the only way it knew; as a sign of God's abandonment of his people. They were once God's chosen; sent into the wilderness to live according to his principles, just as the Israelites had once been commissioned to do the same. But Israel had declined and now, obviously, New England was doing the same--and God was angry.[3]

The evidence of "worldliness," preoccupation with private interests, rejection of authority, absence of brotherly love and affection, so prevalent in the church struggles was both a cause and a sign of God's displeasure with his people. Moreover, the ministers found other signs of divine wrath. The Connecticut Valley experienced extended periods of drought, several unusually severe storms, and a succession of dismal harvests in the late 1660's and early 1670's. In addition, sickness seemed more prevalent than usual with violent outbreaks of influenza and typhoid taking many lives--including those of numerous clergy and other leading public figures. Finally, of course, came the terrible Indian war of 1675-76 when much of the Valley was ravaged or threatened by King Phillip's warriors. All of those events convinced the clergy that New England had "declined" from the lofty ideas and purposed of her founders and was incurring the wrath of God as a result. Consequently, the divines closed ranks--doctrinal differences temporarily lost their significance--as one and all sought to exhort and to guide the people back to the proper path and to restore to themselves their once lofty position of authority and respect.[4]

The ministers utilized the only weapon available--the pulpit--to press their views. Their sermons became pessismistic and filled with cries of impending doom, and they began to liken their own role to that of the biblical prophet Jeremiah. As Jeremiah once warned the backsliding Israelites of impending disaster so now the Valley ministry adopted those same arguments toward

God's chosen of the 17th century; warning the people of the nearness of retribution. In a short time the "Jeremiad" was universal and, wherever there was a public gathering at which a minister spoke, the people could expect their sins to be recounted and God's wrath foretold.[5]

One of the earliest known examples of the reforming sermon in the Connecticut Valley was given by James Fitch of Norwich before an election day gathering in Hartford in 1673.[6] He cited the controversies in the churches and towns as evidence of God's displeasure. He reminded his listeners of their "mission" in the wilderness and of the covenant existing between God and New England. In that covenant, he argued, New England promised obedience to God's will in return for protection from internal and external dangers. Social tranquility, Finch intimated, was a sure sign of God's pleasure. Harmony and conformity were indications that New England was fulfilling its obligation. Discord and disunity, however, were signs of apostasy and degeneration; signs that the people had broken the covenant. The hatred and bitterness engendered by the church struggles was evidence of God's displeasure, and subsequent famine, disease, and storms were products of divine wrath.

Finch specifically cited the churches of Hartford, Windsor, and New Haven as three great churches where controversies continued unabated. Consistent with the clergy's new approach to the nature of the dissension, he cited men's "private interests" as the ultimate source of travail. In other words, he went on, it was not so much that men disagreed that brought tragedy, but the spirit in which they did so for they argued not from a sense of the welfare of the whole or from a spirit of brotherly love and affection, but from a desire to seek private gain at public expense. The "sidings and party-taking Interests" of the people were at fault, and such interests, he warned, had to be destroyed. In concluding he urged the people to examine themselves for other signs of apostasy. "The Doctrine calleth for Self-Examination;" he concluded, "Let us Examine ourselves, and commune with our hearts..., we live; in perilous dayes, are some Storms blown over worse than those may soon come upon New England, will the Lord be a Pillar of Fire round about New England."[7]

The "pillar of fire" visited the Valley sooner than even Fitch had anticipated. The ministry interpreted King Phillip's War as God's revenge, and, in 1676, a "reforming synod" met in Hartford to find the reasons for "God's controversy" with the Valley and to determine what might be done to placate the Almighty.[8] The synod responded with the same analysis propounded by James Fitch in 1673. The clergy absolved itself of any blame and placed it, instead, on the shoulders of the laity. Worldliness was the source of evil and the contentions in the churches were but symptoms of the new spirit among the people. No mention was made of Presbyterian or Congregationalist doctrines as sources of division. Rather, the clergy emphasized the pursuit of private interests and the rejection of duly constituted authority. New England's sin, it concluded, was in reality, "the root actually and nextly of all the other sins... Apostasie from the true Religion. We have fallen away from our heritage."[9]

The "apostasy" was interpreted by the synod as a decline of piety, a general and conscious neglect of religious duties. In citing the sins of omission of the people the clergy mentioned the neglect of secret prayer and self-examination and of family duties such as morning prayer, the absence of private christian meetings, non-attendance at public worship, non-participation in the sacraments, as well as failure of some to "take hold of the covenant" and the fact of others living "in breach of it." Underlying the concern for personal piety was the theme that the stability of church and state was grounded in the stability of the family unit and that the solidarity of that unit was the direct result of the performance of religious duties. "How can it be," the clerics argued, "that a master of family, who liveth in neglect of Family duties, should prove a true Friend to the purity and lover of religion in Church, or to a true pious Government in the Common

Wealth?"[10] The non-performance of pietistic acts released a hundred baser instincts. Sensuality, pride, lust, greed, and self-interest, were, in the eyes of those attending the synod, the "bitter fruit of Apostasie."[11]

It was obvious that, although the ministers were concerned about a bloody war, and its causes, their real concern was with the other "war" still raging in many churches and communities. They could not drive from their minds the spectre of what had happened, and was happening, in Hartford, Windsor, Wethersfield, and a host of other towns and, in particular, what had happened to their own authority. Thus, when they spoke of the "sensuality" of the people, of the pursuance of private interests at the expense of the public weal, they looked beyond the Indian uprising to the uprising of the brethren. Also, that they cited the neglect of religious duties as a source of evil was an indication that their message was directed, primarily, to their congregations and not to the society as a whole. The "duties" they mentioned were the duties of people within the discipline of the church who could be held accountable for non-performance. To the clergy the decline of Connecticut society was the direct result of the misbehaviour of the church members; not the ministry or the multitudes outside the churches. The synod of 1676 was an obvious attempt by the ministry to bind their wounds, to smooth over internal differences and promote reformation. Yet, it was also a condemnation of the laity for utilizing ministerial arguments over church discipline to strip the divines of the authority and prestige they deserved. The clergymen were telling their flocks that the "greatness" of the first generation had been its willingness to follow its leaders, especially the clergy, and that the apostasy of the present generation was its attempt to overturn that system by ignoring the advice and the commands of its leaders. The synod of 1676 was a sharp rebuke to the laity's quest for power.

The ministry's counter-attack against the "offenses" of the people assumed several forms. Of necessity, its essence was an exhortation from the pulpit. The clergy was greatly hampered by the lack of a printing press to publish its views for the nearest press was in Boston which meant that a tract published in that town was not likely to be read or to have an effect on laymen in Farmington, Killingworth or Hadley. Hence, the clergy had to utilize other means. One was the reforming covenant, an approach not peculiar to the Valley churches but, nonetheless, one widely used by the ministry to stem the rising tide of "sensuality."

The reforming covenant was more than a simple renewal of a church covenant, assuming the church had one. Instead, it was a specific agreement among the brethren which specified sins plaguing the congregation, listed the remedies to be applied and provided for periodic renewal. In most churches little attempt was made to discriminate between church members and non-church members in determining those eligible to "take hold" of the reforming covenant. Generally it was open to all who wished to participate and was often directed toward young people, among whom it was thought worldliness and sensuality were running rampant.[12]

A good example of the "reforming covenant" was adopted by the Norwich church in 1675. It was not intended as a covenant for membership or as a confession of faith but was a list of the evils of the Norwich people and of the remedies needed to correct those evils. It was especially directed toward youth and stated that all males, upon reaching age eight, were to be catechized to age thirteen. At that time they were to be joined by their female counterparts to receive private instruction and to be under church discipline until their admission to full communion. In addition the church agreed to celebrate the Lord's Supper more frequently--once every six weeks--and to be more diligent in rebuking brethren for moral offences.[13]

A similar covenant was adopted by the First Church of Hartford in 1695. Its purpose was the reformation of the young people of the church and was signed by 192 persons, all of whom appear to have been short of their majority. It included the phrase "we do freely give up ourselves to the Lord to walke in communion with him in the ordinances appointed in his holy word," suggesting a covenant of membership. Yet several of the signers were already members and the covenant specifically stated that it was created solely to combat the evils of "fornication and drunkenness" so prevalent among the children of the church. Like the Norwich covenant it was no more than a pledge of good conduct and did not affect the membership status of those signing.[14]

Other avenues were also open to the ministers. One of the most obvious was to seek the aid of the civil government. True, the evils of the country--as outlined by the synod of 1676--appeared outside the realm of civil authority. Yet, as each minister who spoke before the General Court on election day was prone to point out, ministers and magistrates shared a joint responsibility for the welfare of the people, and, in that time of crisis, the clergy could not be expected to promote a reformation unaided. John Whiting of Hartford's Second Church, giving the election sermon in 1686, spoke to the newly elected rulers of the colony in just such terms. The duty of the ruler was to reward good and punish evil. "This is the design and duty of Rulers," he argued. "The sword of civil power is put into their hand by divine appointment, as to reward them that do well, so to wound evil doers...In matter of Righteousness, Their work is large; In general, a faithful endeavour to do every man right without favour or fear."[15] In particular, Whiting warned the magistracy to avoid the tendency toward self-interest exhibited by the people. The ministry, though natural allies of the magistracy in God's work, were wary of their colleagues, knowing full well that many of the laymen dominating the congregations were the same ones sitting in positions of power in local and colonial government.

But events proved the General Court as sensitive as the ministry to the alarming currents in church and society. The Court, like the clergy, had been deeply involved in the church struggles of mid-century and had experienced stinging rebukes to its authority from recalcitrant citizens. Like the clergy the Court often found its good offices used by warring factions in the pursuit of selfish aims. Moreover, Court members were well aware of the inability of clergy and magistrates to calm the passions of controversy and to affect solutions. On several occasions the Court and clergy had watched helplessly while groups of dissident laymen flounted law by withdrawing from established churches.[16] As a result, Court members welcomed the reforming synod of 1676 and endorsed its findings.

The Court responded to ministerial pressure for action as best it could. Since most of the ills enumerated by the synod were outside its jurisdiction, the Court proceeded along the course it had charted during the 1650's and 1660's. The people were reminded frequently of the evil omens in natural disasters such as storms, floods, droughts, and insects, as well as the significance of Indian attacks, disease, and a host of other social irritants. Fast days and days of humiliation were proclaimed to remind the people of their erring ways, and, occasionally, laws were passed to remedy specific abuses. The zenith of Court interest in the Valley's "decay" came at the May session in 1680 when volumes of words were expended debating the condition of churches and society in the Connecticut Valley, the signs of God's wrath toward his people, and what could be done to lessen his anger. The Court deviated little from the findings of the earlier synod. Whereas the ministry found the source of God's wrath in the neglect of Christian duties, the Court found it in a general "decay of love to God and one to another." Yet in the society both groups agreed that the divisions within the churches resulted from a fundamental moral breakdown rather than issues of church polity. The General Court stated its conclusion thusly:

> "This Court seriously considering the dispensation of Divine Providence towards our nation in generall and ourselves in particular, and the decay of love to God and one to another appearing in those divissions that in some places doe yet continue, with the abounding of sin amongst

> us...threatening divine anger against us, as ready to fall upon us in the present face of affayres, and in the unseasonableness of the weather, the overflowings of the watters in sundry places...all which calls upon us aloud to humble ourselves before the Lord for what is provoking amongst us; and this Court accordingly doe appoynt the 3d Wednesday in June next to be observed throughout this collony a day of publiquae humiliation and prayer..."[17]

The call for a fast day was, however, about as far as the Court would go in an attempt to reform the manners and morals of the people. Its specific recommendations for reformation were feeble indeed; amounting to little more than suggestions that the ministry catechize youth on the Sabbath and hold weekly lectures.[18]

The Court's consideration of civil and ecclesiastical disorders was significant, however, in that it showed a new and altered perspective on the nature of the disputes. In recommending toleration for Presbyterianism only a decade before the Court had agreed with the ministry that disciplinary questions had provided the spark for the lay revolt. In the interim the clergy had altered its position to one of labeling the uprisings as directed toward established authority and the social values buttressing that authority. The clergy now viewed the struggle as a quest for power, and in the Court's reassessment of the situation its members were forced to agree. Moreover, like their clerical brethren the Court now saw that quest as symbolic of a general moral breakdown in the society. But the Court had few concrete solutions, evidently feeling that in matters of personal morality their influence was considerably below that of the clergy.

Furthermore, not all Valley towns and churches lay within the civil jurisdiction of Connecticut. The church disputes had resulted in sizeable migrations of people up the river and the creation of several thriving settlements of Connecticut people north of Springfield and within the boundaries of Massachusetts. Those communities, though generally tied to Connecticut by blood and tradition and created out of Connecticut's strife, were nonetheless under the political and ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Bay. Thus, though natural inclinations might be toward families and friends in Connecticut, geography aligned those settlers with the distant Bay.

The migration of the dissenters upriver probably seemed a mixed blessing to the ecclesiastical leaders of the Bay for, though Massachusetts had escaped the upheavals of the Valley towns its churches and ministry were plagued by many of the same problems. Questions of polity split the Bay clergy in the 1650's and led to the Synod of 1662 which, while ostensibly seeking to heal ministerial rifts, had only widened them. Baptism, church membership, the collective authority of the ministry; many of the same questions vexing Connecticut's ministers also divided their colleagues in the Bay.

Massachusetts had one advantage in that a Presbyterian faction was not so large or well-defined as in Connecticut: most of the disputants at least professed faith in Congregationalism of one sort or another. The Bay also had a distinct disadvantage, however; the availability of the printing press. After the synod of 1662 opponents and supporters of the Half-Way Covenant took to their quills to publicize their opinions and managed to create bitter divisions within the clerical community and the colony with their bitter invectives. Both sides proved intractable and the resulting dissonance did much to weaken clerical authority in Massachusetts.

Ministerial squabbling in the Bay also did great harm to the public facade of ecclesiastical orthodoxy thrown up by colonial leaders and shielded by the pronouncements of the Cambridge Platform. However, the clergy was not alone in its bickering for laymen proved equally capable of divisiveness. Heterodox believers such as Quakers and Baptists plagued the colony in the 1650's and 60's. Also, laymen were quick to pick up the points of discipline disputed by the clergy and, as the clerical debate accelerated in the 1660's, the laity followed suit. Throughout all of this leaders of the colony, both lay and clerical, noted the same irreligious attitudes, the same decline of personal piety, and the same distaste for the old ways among the laity that troubled Connecticut leaders at about the same time. That discovery prompted Bay leaders to talk of "God's Controversy with New England" and of declension and decay and the need for reformation. Consequently, the "Jeremiad," the call for reform, dominated ministerial utterances in Massachusetts from the middle 1660's on.

Moreover, throughout Massachusetts' difficulties ran the same themes of anti-clericalism and decaying ministerial authority found in Connecticut's travail. For example, in the struggle over the formation of a third church in Boston in the late 1660's, the collective authority of ministers and magistrates was seriously weakened by the passions of two opposing groups in Boston's venerable First Church, each bent on having its own way or nothing at all. But, in general, the two year struggle over Third Church was the only lay upheaval that even began to approach the dimensions of the twenty year struggle in Hartford. Although there were many minor squabbles, Massachusetts avoided the complete defeat of traditional ecclesiastical authority and the weakening of traditional political authority that was an accomplished fact in Connecticut.[19]

In a country already badly divided the Massachusetts clergy saw little need for a transfusion of Connecticut's dissidents. Thus they watched the new settlements in the upper valley carefully, knowing full well that the distance from established Bay communities was an invitation to heterodoxy. Yet, initially at least, the settlers of Hadley, Morthampton, and Hatfield were quiet. They were confronted with the huge tasks of creating and maintaining homes, churches and communities. They seemed tired of dissension and trouble and showed little inclination to repeat what they had left behind. In addition, they had only one minister of any stature--John Russell--and Russell, although once accused of Presbyterianism, now showed little interest in again becoming a center of controversy. Nonetheless, the unique position of the upriver settlements--separated by a hundred miles of forest from the Bay towns and by colonial boundary from nearby Connecticut--gave them a remarkable opportunity to reject the institutions of both colonies and to innovate.

One man would attempt to exploit that unique position and would further divide the already badly fragmented Massachusetts ministerial community by actively seeking to undermine the country's Congregational orthodoxy. That man was Solomon Stoddard, Harvard educated and product of a wealthy Boston family who, after assuming the Northampton pulpit of the deceased Eleazer Mather in 1669, quickly began to use his isolated post to sow the seeds of ecclesiastical discontent. He came out for Presbyterianism, but of a kind not previously known in New England. Calling it the "Instituted Church" he argued for a parish system open to any professing Christian who cared to enter. It was his belief that

Christ had "instituted" his church for a single purpose, the salvation of sinners, and that its ordinances were intended not only as "seals" of the covenant of grace but also as the means for the transmission of grace. In matters of polity Stoddard argued for a church organized with military discipline for the battle with Satan; a church authoritarian to a degree undreamed of in New England. All power was to be vested in a great national synod of clergy, and local churches would derive their authority from that synod. Stoddard rejected all Congregationalist notions of church covenants and congregational power, arguing that decisions concerning church government and doctrine were the prerogative of the ruling elders. Stoddard's minister was to be invested with so much authority that Increase Mather would later lament that Stoddard encouraged the creation of a Protestant "Pope." The title stuck and the Northampton divine became known as "Pope Stoddard." Others said that Stoddard foresaw his clergy as gods, and, subsequently, he and his Valley followers became known as the "River Gods."[20]

Though the full scope of Stoddard's position would not be known publicly in New England until the publication of his Doctrine of Instituted Churches in 1700, his heterodoxy was quickly detected by the Bay clergy, particularly Increase Mather, minister of Boston's Second (Old North) Church. Stoddard's emergence added a new and frightening dimension to Massachusett's already chaotic ecclesiastical situation for his views appeared to be evidence that Connecticut's turmoil, and especially the Presbyterianism of many clergy, was beginning to lapse over into Massachusetts. Little wonder the Bay clergy decided they had sufficient reason to hold a reforming synod of their own.[21]

Increase Mather, who was rapidly becoming one of the most important and influential ministers in the Bay Colony, led the group of ministers who, in 1679, petitioned the General Court for a reforming synod. The reasons given for such a synod were legion: storms, disease, Indian wars, drought, the decline of personal piety and enthusiasm for religion among laymen, heterodox opinions such as those offered by the Baptists, Massachusett's precarious position _viz-a-viz_ England, and a host of other problems. All were interpreted as signs of God's displeasure with his people and of impending disaster for the country. The synod's duty was to determine the reasons for "God's controversy" and to suggest a path to "reformation." Underlying the clergy's petition, however, was a haunting fear of rising anticlericalism in the colony, and a very real sense that its authority, both on an individual and a collective basis, was slipping from its grasp.

Both of the latter problems were viewed as resulting from the split in the ministerial ranks which had resulted from the failure to reach agreement on certain questions of discipline. The clergy had a vague sense that its disputes were the real source of the country's woes, the same feeling its Connecticut colleagues had expressed a dozen years earlier before the ill-fated synod of 1667. The Massachusetts divines sensed that God's controversy might, in truth, be with them, and it was for this reason that Increase Mather feared Solomon Stoddard for the Northampton minister represented a distinctly new and radical element in the colony's ecclesiastical debates. Hence, though the Bay ministers talked of finding the "Causes and State of Gods Controversy with us," they were, in reality, quite convinced--just as their Connecticut equivalents had once been convinced--that the basic cause was the discord among themselves and that it was essential to end that discord before it grew worse. "It may now seem very necessary," the petitioners concluded, "for us so to do, at least by owning and asserting the same faith and order of the Gospel in which these churches were at first established, and of which our Fathers witnessed a good Confession in such an Assembly at Cambridge, in the year 1648."[22]

But in agreeing to the request the General Court interpreted the real intent of their wording as a synod to revise the old Cambridge Platform to account for dissenting views, lest Boston become another Hartford, and Cambridge another Windsor. "In answer to a motion made by some of the reverend elders," the Court stated, "that there might be a conveneing of the elders and messengers of the churches in forme of a synod, for the revisall of the platforme of discipline agreed upon by the churches, 1647 (sic), and what else may appeare necessary for the preventing schismes, haeresies, prophaneness, and the establishment of the churches in one faith and order."[23] The Court's charge sounded much like the one of the Connecticut Court to the clergy in 1667; expressing the need for an ecclesiastical constitution not necessarily excluding but accommodating the otherwise-minded. Massachusetts was obviously approaching the problem in exactly the same way as Connecticut had done a decade earlier; by assuming that the wickedness of the people and God's subsequent anger was attributable, primarily to ecclesiastical differences among the clergy and that all could be smoothed over by merely patching up the Cambridge Platform. But Connecticut had now rejected that rationale and unless Massachusetts did the same the future ecclesiastical postures of the two colonies were likely to be radically dissimilar.

The Synod convened in September, 1679. The topics considered were nearly identical to those argued by the Connecticut clergy in 1667 with the same three factions--moderate and rigid Congregationalists and Presbyterians--in evidence, though not in the same proportions. The basic question was the "decay" of religion among the population but most of the debate was given over to a discussion of three questions of church discipline: the responsibility of churches to their children, the respective spheres of authority of elders and brethren and the associated issues of consociations and synods, and the requirements for church membership. Of these, the last generated the most controversy.

The synod's real intentions have caused considerable disagreement among modern students of the period. Certainly the remarks of Increase Mather both at the time and in later years indicated a desire to condemn those not conforming to accepted notions of the "New England Way." In 1677, for example, in a sermon before the Massachusetts General Court Mather lashed out at Presbyterianism saying that "I wish there be not teachers found in our Israel, that have espoused loose large principles here, designing to bring all persons to the Lord's Supper, who have an historical faith, and are not scandalous in life, though they never had experience of a work of regeneration in their souls."[24] His petition to the Court for a synod of the churches made specific reference to a desire for the ministry of the present generation to take hold of the principles of the Cambridge Platform. Yet when the synod convened, Mather's sentiments were clearly not those of the majority and an atmosphere of conciliation rather than repression was maintained. Symbolic of that atmosphere was the discussion of church membership requirements. Some of the elders present had drafted a proposal for consideration by the group "that persons should make a Relation of the work of Gods Spirit upon their hearts, in order to coming into full Communion."[25] Other elders objected to the proposal and a formal debate was suggested. Stoddard was chosen to argue the affirmative of the proposal "Whether those Professors of Religion as are of good Conversation, are not to be admitted to full Communion, provided they are able to Examine themselves, and discern the Lords body."[26]

Increase Mather was given the negative and Urian Oakes was appointed to act as moderator. The debate was spirited, particularly on Mather's part. "After some time," wrote Peter Thacher in his Journal of the synod, "the rest of his arguements were deferred and at present it was Eased."[27] The synod then searched for a statement on church membership which would satisfy both parties. The resulting proposal was full of ambiguous wording yet acceptable to Stoddard, the spokesman for the Presbyterians. He wrote at a later time that "the result was that they blotted out that clause of Making a Relation of the work of Gods Spirit, and put in the room of it, The Making a Profession of their Faith and Repentance; and so I Voted with the Rest and am of the same judgment still."[28]

The compromising spirit of the synod was further shown in its recommendations to the General Court. The proposals reflected the moderate Congregationalist majority, yet denounced neither rigid Congregationalists nor Presbyterians nor did it recommend that dissenters be forced to adhere to moderate principles. In regard to the Cambridge Platform, for example, the synod sought to appease the Presbyterians by recommending merely that "It would tend much to promote the Interest of Reformation...for us to declare our adherence...in the Platform of Discipline."[29] Moreover, the synod chastised the churches for not supplying themselves with "a full supply of Officers in the Churches, according to Christs Institution" but made no attempt to define "Christs Institution" as either Congregational or Presbyterian. Finally, in addition to recommending the adoption of the compromise stand on church membership, the synod urged that "discipline" be upheld in the churches but made no attempt to declare whether that discipline was to be administered according to Congregational or Presbyterian principles.[30]

However, although the reforming synod of 1679 ended in a spirit of harmony and tranquility, an event occurred during the course of the meetings which cast doubt upon the elders' ability to solve the colony's problems by a simple statement of unity, an event which hinted at the depth of anti-clericalism among laymen and indicated the extent to which ministerial authority and prestige had ebbed away. The incident involved a heated exchange between Solomon Stoddard and Ralph Wheelocke, member of the General Court, founder of the town of Medway and, at 79, one of the oldest lay brethren present. It happened during one of the early discussions of the "sins" of the people. Wheelocke, obviously rankled by the minister's debate, rose and "declared that there was a cry of injustice in that magistrates and ministers were not rated." That outburst against high authority, recorded Peter Thacher in his journal, "occasioned a very warme discourse. Mr. Stodder charged the deputy (Wheelocke) with saying what was not true and the Deputy Governor told him (Wheelocke) he deserved to be Laid by the heals...after we broke up the deputy and several others went home with Mr. Stodder and the deputy asked forgiveness of him and told him he freely forgave, but Mr. Stodder was high."[31] Obviously Ralph Wheelocke had touched an extremely sensitive nerve among ministers, and magistrates, and people.

For the ministers of Connecticut the conclusions of the Massachusetts synod were largely a matter of indifference. True, their Bay colleagues had emphasized the worldly attitudes of their congregations, the decline of personal piety, and the need for a "reformation" in the society. Yet most of the rhetoric had been expended in an attempt to mediate the clergy's own differences of opinion on matters of discipline. The synod had created an artificial air of harmony, evidently assuming that such an attitude would calm the passions of their laymen. But all of that assumed a position of leadership and authority for the ministers and that an open display of brotherly affection would stimulate the laymen to do likewise. The Connecticut ministers operated under no such illusions and they had the battle scars of three decades of warfare to prove their point. Ministerial arguments over Presbyterian and Congregational doctrines were, they believed then, neither the cause nor the effect of the new aggressiveness and selfishness exhibited by the people and no artificial display of disciplinary solidarity was likely to soften the hardened hearts of the people one whit. The Connecticut ministry had learned, to its dismay, that though the people's rhetoric sounded like that of the clergy they were not so much interested in the fine points of Presbyterian or Congregational discipline as they were interested in the acquisition of power.

The problems of the Connecticut clergy were compounded by the growing feeling that its efforts to effect a reformation among the people were ending in failure. The flurry of activity in the 1670's; the synods, the reforming covenants, the preaching, teaching, the concern of the civil government, the "reforming" laws were portrayed in the ministerial utterances of the 1680's and 1690's as having accomplished little. Samuel

Wakeman, of Fairfield, delivering the election day sermon in Hartford in 1685, sounded the note of despair with his title, "Sound Repentance. The Right Way to Escape Deserved Ruine."[32] Wakeman began by reminding his listeners of their special status with God--the covenant--and of the conditional nature of that status. "If they will be his People he will be their God," he thundered, "if they will own him he will own them: if they will continue with him he will continue with them, but if they will none of him he will none of them; if they cast off him he will cast off them. 2 Chron. 15.2."[33] God, then, would not ignore the covenant unless his people failed to fulfill its conditions. And that, Wakeman warned, was exactly what was happening. The greatest sin of the people was their "unworthy entertainments of the glorious Gospel of the blessed God: our receiving of the grace of God in vain, the neglect of that great salvation..."[34] In short, the hearts of the people were dead and no longer receptive to the great truths of the gospel. Piety had declined and had been replaced by formalism. New England was hypocritical, performing the externals of religion while hearts were dormant. "Men are gone off in their judgments," he went on, "stand not so clearly and fixedly perswaded in their own minds of the necessity and importance of such attendancies, and begin to take up an opinion that there needs not so much ado that all this is not of that absolute necessity, but that it will be a tolerable thing, at least to abate somewhat of it."[35]

Thus, for Wakeman, and for the Connecticut clergy, religion had become the formality of going through the motions. Men were no longer concerned with the condition of their hearts, no longer sensitive to the need for grace or the dangers of perdition. They were consumed by a wave of selfish concern for private interests instead of the public weal. Interpreted in terms of religion this meant they no longer had their eyes on God but were succumbing to the falsehood that an appearance of piety was sufficient to gain admission to heaven. "Where is the rule for daily secret Prayer, meditation, self-examination?" Wakeman concluded. "Or where is the rule that a man must everyday read a Chapter or two to his Family; yet the Judgments are secretly, insensibly wrought off from laying the weight and stress upon these things, as to the constant, diligent, accurate thorough attendance of them."[36]

But none of this was particularly new. It was a repetition of the synod's findings a decade earlier. What was new in Wakeman's argument was the clerics' sense of frustration, the feeling that the people were not responding to their peril or to the clergy's attempts to lead them away from it. "How many wayes, and for how long a time hath God manifeste his displeasure against us? Hath not the sword gone through our Land, hath not sore diseases had their annual return upon us; yea, of late both Summer and Winter abode with us to the taking of many from us? and how sadly hath God of late years smitten us in all the labours of our hands by blasting, mildews, catter pillars, worms, tares, floods and droughts."[37] Moreover, an unusually large number of magistrates and ministers had died in recent years; a sure sign of God's wrath. Certainly, Wakeman lamented, God had given his people sufficient indication of his displeasure yet they continued to pursue their own desires.

Wakeman introduced a second element as well; declining church membership. It had not been cited previously by either the Synod of 1676, the Court, or by the clergy in its calls for reform. But Wakeman spoke of it as a universally accepted fact. "Once," he asserted, "our Sion had multitudes converted to God." Now the number of converts were few and that, he continued, was another sign that God had departed the land. Few conversions meant holy ordinances were without divine power. Men were "forsaken of his sometimes working power and vertue towards the souls of his own, they are not affected, humbled, quickened, raised, warmed, comforted by them, as sometimes they do not prosper, thrive flourish and bring forth fruit under them as heretofore...and can we have a sadder token of gods withdrawing and estranging himself from us than his failing his Ordinances of the wonted influences of his spirit, both as to conversion and Edification."[38]

Wakeman's emphasis on declining church membership was evidence of yet another approach by the ministry to the moral decay of the land. Previously, in synod and sermon the clergy had spoken primarily to the members of the churches, citing their failures as the source of God's displeasure. In neighboring Massachusetts, however, blame had always been affixed to the entire population. Wakeman's sermon was evidence that the Connecticut clergy was now following the same path. More evidence was provided in John Whiting's election day sermon a year later (1686). Whiting, of Hartford's Second Church, echoed Wakeman's condemnation of the entire populace then reminisced about an earlier age when all aspects of colonial life were qualitatively superior to the present. "Shall I say," he lamented, "it was better every way. We had better peace and plenty, better health and harvests, in former than later years; it was better for soul and body, better in spirituals, less Sin; and better in temporals, less sorrow."[39]

Regardless of the truth of the ministerial lament the fact remained that they believed what they said. They were convinced of a "decline," and underlying that conviction was a deep sense of frustration rooted in the feeling that their authority and prestige among the people was disappearing.[40] It was almost commonplace in the reforming sermons, particularly the annual election sermon, for the ministry not only to exhort listeners to reform manners and morals but also to obey persons in authority. Samuel Whiting in his 1686 election sermon ended with an exhortation to ministers, people and magistrates: a common practice. In his charge to fellow clergy he said "The Lord hath made us Watchmen, to watch for souls, as those that must give account. And therein our work is, to receive the word at his mouth, and give warning from him, to deliver his mind and message plainly...To awaken men from sin, and warn them to a Saviour, by both Doctrine and Conversation, to lead in the way to heaven."[41] Certainly that recitation of the ministerial function enlightened no attending divine. But such was not its purpose. It was directed to the "people" and was a reminder of the exalted function of the minister. It was a plea to the laymen to reflect on the ministerial role and give the deference due to the Lord's "Watchman." It was a reminder that minister's were selected to lead and others were expected to follow just as "Obedience to Magistrates is a moral duty that all men should mind, yet many need to be reminded of it."[42]

The crisis of authority which initiated and sustained the clergy's analysis of the ills of

Connecticut society and which underlay its calls for reform was given eloquent testimony a decade after Whiting's appearance before the Court. The occasion was election day, 1697, and the speaker was a young minister from New London, Gurdon Saltonstall. Saltonstall, who was yet unborn when the Valley churches divided in the 1650's and 60's, presented a sermon which could easily have been made during those years and been germane to the country's problems. Though a citizen of Connecticut for only a short time, Saltonstall's presentation was devoted to an abstract discussion of the nature of civil authority, the duties of the magistrate, the rights and responsibilities of the people, and the end of civil government in the colony. He emphasized the representative character of the political institutions of Connecticut and the people's power and glory under them. Yet throughout his presentation there ran a re-occurring theme, one not necessarily consonant with his statements concerning popular power. That theme had to do with the peculiar purpose which had brought settlers to the country. "You (the Court) have the Care and Charge of a People whom God hath by special favor taken to be his own Peculiar," he told the assembled throng, "and such a Trust as this ought to be strenuously and faithfully discharged. The Lord our God hath by signal Protections, and a stretched out Arm, made these (once dark) corners

corners of the earth a place of comfortable Entertainment to a Remnant of his faithful Servants, and their Seed: Here he hath intrusted us with the choise Mercies of his Word and Ordinances: we have had them and enjoyed them, in safety from all the endeavours of such, as with an envious eye and vexed Soul, have beheld what God hath been doing for us."[43] The nature of the mission, Saltonstall continued, required a virtuous and intelligent population. It required a commitment by all to the common good over private interests; a recognition that the journey of God's chosen into the wilderness was an occasion of cosmic importance not only to the present age but to all future generations as well. It entailed the awareness that if New England failed to create and perpetuate a society reflecting God's will for mankind then man would have lost his last opportunity to purify himself and his institutions and create a new Eden.

Having outlined the basic responsibilities of the inhabitants of New England, Saltonstall repeated a refrain familiar to Valley inhabitants: that people ought to choose virtuous rulers and follow their judgments as long as they did not attempt to thwart God's will. "God hath designed the Civil Government of his People," Saltonstall lectured, "to concenter with Ecclesiastical Administrations and (though by different Mediums) they are both levelled at the same end; the maintaining of Piety, and promoting of a covenant walk...This is the work that belongs to you in your Publick Capacities; and it calls for your Wisdom and Justice, and Zeal and Holiness; if you would be found thus ruling with God, and faithful with his Saints."[44] Thus, did Saltonstall make the clergy's case for reformation as plain as possible. The people of the Connecticut Valley had been sent to the New World to show the Old that man could live in harmony with the Will of his God. That "mission" required complete submission of the individual to the noble purposes of the whole. Success could and would come only through respect, reverence and submission to rightly constituted authority--civil and ecclesiastical.

The analysis completed, Saltonstall informed his listeners that despite decades of warning from God, his ministers' and his magistrates' authority was not respected, least of all followed. Private interests held sway in church and commonwealth. "Oh! how justly may the Lord complain of us, that we are become the degenerate Plant of a strange Vine unto him? Where is that Zeal for God and his ways that high Esteem of Gospel Priviledges; that faithful improvement of Sacred Ordinances, that Care and Concernment for the Advancing of the Kingdom of Christ? which things were once our praise."[45] The people, Saltonstall warned, had forsaken their mission, rebuked the fine examples of their ancestors, turned from the virtuous life, and now faced the wrath of God's vengeance. "Hath not the Lord himself been coming near to Judgment!" Saltonstall asked. "It is obvious that God hath a Controversy with us, and He is wrath with his Inheritance...yet if we consider the bloodshed, and ruinous Devastations in some Places of this Land, together with the languishing State of the whole Country at this Day, we may also take up the Psalmists complaint."[46]

Thus it was no accident that Saltonstall, in concluding his remarks with the customary exhortations, neglected to speak to the ministry and addressed all of his remarks to the civil rulers and to the people. To the rulers he urged wisdom and justice and enumerated the ways in which they could aid in the reformation of the land. To the people he repeated that good rulers came only from a good people and that he would merely waste words if he urged magistrates to be virtuous when their electors were not. He pleaded with the people to elect good rulers, but, above all, to return to their holy mission by reinstituting the proper attitude toward civil and ecclesiastical authority. Civil and ecclesiastical rulers were, he assured them, certified by God as the interpreters of the common good and it was the people's function to forsake private interests, to reject factionalism, and to respect and submit to properly constituted authority in the pursuance of New England's peculiar destiny. "Speak no evil of Dignities; Abhor that Unchristian way of Detraction, Backbiting and Slander. If they are God's Viceregents, certainly it must be a Crying Sin and Shame for us thus to treat them. Do our Enemies charge us, that this is the way wherein we have been used to requite those that with greatest Pains, have travailed for the Publick good?"[47] Saltonstall was speaking of civil authority, but his words were just as applicable to the plight of the clergy.

Yet, while Saltonstall's sermon was eloquent, his analysis succinct, its importance lay, perhaps, in what was left unsaid. Clearly the strategy constructed by the Valley clergy twenty years earlier for the reformation of the sins of the people and the restoration of respect for authority had failed. The attempt to mute petty conflicts over church discipline in order to present a solid front before the people had accomplished nothing. Saltonstall's sermon was proof that the minister's stock had not risen, that his voice continued to go unheeded and sin prevailed. In politics faction, intrigue, greed, and corruption had replaced the search for the Godly commonwealth.[48] In the churches the perpetuation of the "power of the fraternity" was the single goal of the laity, and woe to the minister whose purposes did not conform to the wishes of the brethren. Examples of the clergy's involuntary subordination to the laity were to be found everywhere. The records of the General Court were filled with complaints from ministers about nonpayment of salaries, often because they had attempted to exercise leadership over their congregations, had alienated portions of the membership and were being punished for their efforts. Too many ministers had shared the fates of Israel Chauncey and John Woodbridge, ministers to warring factions in Windsor. Neither man had been present when the fighting had begun under John Warham in the early 1660's--fighting which had resulted in the formation of a second church. Each had been called to serve and had then sought to reunite the dissidents into a single church. When such was finally accomplished in 1680 the two ministers were summarily dismissed for it was argued that they had become symbols of the divisions of the people. They left and spent the next few years attempting to collect the salaries their congregations had neglected to pay them.[49] The position of the ministry in the Valley had not improved in thirty years, nor had the general condition of the people, and some divines were intent upon finding new ways to attack the problem. Among them was Solomon Stoddard.

IV

Solomon Stoddard:
The Struggle Renewed

The non-partisan appeals for Reformation which marked the outlook of the Valley ministry in the closing decades of the seventeenth century did not disappear immediately. Many ministers continued to use the technique and to believe its assumptions well into the eighteenth century. But most came to the position that its analysis of the situation in the Valley was incorrect and that its solutions were unsuccessful. The leading figure in the reappraisal was the minister of the First Congregational Church, Northampton, Massachusetts, from 1669 to 1729, Solomon Stoddard. Stoddard by word and deed sought to push the New England churches toward a Presbyterian ecclesiastical constitution. He agreed with his fellow clergy that the land cried out for reform, but, unlike his colleagues, he refused to place the sole blame on the people. The greatest burden of guilt, he argued, lay with the clergy. Their tolerance of a land of unconverted sinners and their proclivity for a Congregational polity--which he blamed for the crisis of authority in New England--was responsible for the degenerate state of the land. Thus, between 1680 and 1710, Stoddard advocated the creation of a national Presbyterian church in New England, a church in which all disciplinary and doctrinal authority would be placed in the hands of a national synod of clergy; a church whose sole reason for existence would be the conversion of sinners, a church "Instituted" by Christ to save souls whose every ordinance would be a means for the dispensation of grace to the unconverted.[1]

Stoddard's peculiar Presbyterianism--his notion of the "Instituted Church"--was new to New England. Consequently, his arguments were viciously attacked by Congregationalists of all sorts, especially by their titular leader, Increase Mather. None of Stoddard's arguments was attacked more vehemently than his notion that the ordinances of Christ's church were instituted primarily for the conversion of sinners. The idea that the Lords Supper was for the dispensation of grace to the wicked was anathema to a generation of ministers raised on the doctrine of the "Seals" and Stoddard was soundly denounced by many as a "papist."

Nor was Stoddard much more popular among New England's Presbyterians. They found him both an asset and a liability. His prestige among the laity made him a distinct asset, yet some of his ideas were anathema even to Presbyterians. Stoddard's views were simply not consonant with New England Presbyterianism, particularly that of the Valley where it was strongest. His arguments for a parish church, regional presbyteries, a national synod, "broad" membership requirements, strong clerical authority in matters of discipline, his rejection of particular church covenants, all were doctrines dear to the hearts of the leading New England Presbyterians at the end of the seventeenth century; to men such as Timothy Woodbridge of Hartford, Eliphalet Adams of New London, Gurdon Saltonstall of New London, and Benjamin Colman of Boston. Yet none save Saltonstall supported Stoddard. Most could accept neither the authoritarianism of Stoddard's church nor his argument for "converting ordinances." In this their views, not Stoddard's, most closely approximated the traditional approach of New England Presbyterianism.[2]

Solomon Stoddard was born in Boston in 1643, the son of a later prominent merchant and political figure, Anthony Stoddard. His boyhood was spent under the tutelage of John Corlet, headmaster of the Cambridge grammar school, and his religious training was conducted by Messrs. Cotton, Wilson and Norton of Boston's First Church. Stoddard entered Harvard College in 1658, graduated in 1662, received the A.M. degree in 1664, then spent three years as a college tutor and as the school librarian. In 1667, ill-health supposedly forced him to accept a position as chaplain to the Governor of the Barbadoes, Daniel Searle, a position he held for a year. In 1668, at the age of 25, he returned to Boston and was preparing to go to England for further study when, upon the recommendation of a Bay area minister, he was approached by a committee from Northampton and asked to fill a vacancy in that church created by the death of Eleazer Mather. Stoddard accepted and went to Northampton some time in 1669.[3]

Although the details of Stoddard's early intellectual development are scant he was associated with Harvard (1658-1667) at a time which must have been exciting and intellectually stimulating for a young student bent on a career in the ministry. The clergy and the churches were inflamed by the issues swirling around the 1662 synod, and Boston was the center of much of that activity. Moreover, the political future of the colony was imperiled by the restoration of Charles II, and the colony's inhabitants, including the clergy, were badly divided over the proper course to be followed _viz_-_a_-_viz_ England.

Boston was a source of much ecclesiastical and political turmoil in Stoddard's Harvard years, and he must have been caught up in the excitement. Certainly his Harvard tutors were. His Commonplace book, covering the years 1660 to 1664, is full of notes on sermons and lectures by diverse members of the colony's clerical establishment, especially John Norton of Boston's First Church and Jonathan Mitchell of the Cambridge church. Both men were activists and innovators. Both were major figures in the 1662 synod, leading the fight for the Half-Way Covenant and for some kind of legal sanction for clerical authority or "consociationalism." Norton, whose sermons fill many of the early pages of Stoddard's book, was also politically active, making a dangerous voyage to plead the colony's case before King Charles II in 1662 and leading a group of concerned citizens in an attempt to tone down the Bay government's open belligerency toward the new King in 1661 and 1662. Stoddard learned well from the fighting Norton and, in 1665, added his signature to a petition of Boston non-freemen protesting the government's failure to reach accord with a Royal Commission sent by Charles to investigate conditions in his American holdings.[4]

In that heady atmosphere of dissension, and with the faint rumblings of Connecticut's civil and ecclesiastical turmoil to be heard in the distance, it would not have been surprising for a quick young mind to sense the problems of the land, especially ecclesiastical problems, and to toy with new ideas. There is considerable evidence to indicate that Stoddard did just that in regard to Presbyterianism. His Commonplace book, for example, contains a list of some eighty books and pamphlets owned by the young scholar in 1664. Conspicuously absent from that list are any of the works of the great Congregational lights of New England's first generation. He owned nothing of

Hooker's, only one sermon by John Cotton, one by Thomas Shepard, and possessed no copy of the Cambridge Platform. In addition, his library was barren of many of the major works of the English divines supposedly so influential on the thought of New England's ministry: Ames, Sibbes, and Perkins. The only treatises on polity Stoddard saw fit to purchase were the works of the arch-antagonist of New England Congregationalism, Samuel Rutherford. Stoddard owned four volumes by the great Presbyterian, including a copy of his most famous and controversial work, The Due Right of Presbyteries.[5]

That Stoddard probably became a Presbyterian during the 1660's is given credence by events that occurred in his later life. He was, of course, identified by numerous sources, including Increase Mather, as one of the leaders--if not the leader--of the "Presbyterian faction" at the Massachusetts synod of 1679, a position he could not have achieved instantaneously.[6] Stoddard alluded to this fact a decade later in responding to a highly critical letter from his friend and fellow pastor, Edward Taylor of Westfield. In 1687 Taylor attacked Stoddard, saying that he had heard that Stoddard was about to "cast off Relations, and to bring all above fourteen years of age, that live morally, and having a Catechisticall knowledge of the Principalls of Religion, to the Lords

Supper."[7] Taylor implied that Stoddard was "inconsistent with Congregationall Principalls," that his rejection of the Congregationall Way would destroy the churches of New England and that "Gods faithfull Ones in following ages will be ready to date the beginning of New England Apostacy in Mr. Stoddard's Motions."[8] Stoddard replied a few months later. He did not deny that he was making "some Endeavor to make Some Alterations as to the way of admitting persons to Full-Communion" but he did deny Taylor's charge that his ideas were ill-considered or dangerous to the future of the churches. "I shall give you this briefe account of the Reason of what I did," Stoddard wrote. "I have been abundantly Satisfied these many years, that we did not attend the Will of God in this matter: and that our neglect therein is the occasion of the greate Prophaneness, and Corruption that hath overspread the land..."[9]

Yet Stoddard made little effort to present his views for public debate during the first thirty years of his Northampton ministry; his confrontation with Increase Mather over the question of church membership at the Synod of 1679 being the major exception. Stoddard wrote a major book in 1685 entitled The Safety of Appearing at the Day of Judgment in the Righteousness of Christ, Opened and Applied.[10] That was his only publication before 1700, and in it he attempted to prove that man needed nothing more than faith in Christ to gain Salvation. Christ's death, the reader was informed, had atoned for man's sins. Stoddard avoided a discussion of church polity or discipline, devoting his efforts instead to the edification of sinners through a discussion of the nature of the conversion experience and the doctrine of atonement. However, when he asked Increase Mather to write an introduction to his work, the Boston divine refused, and Stoddard eventually wrote his own, dedicating it to his congregation.[11]

Much of Stoddard's reticence to publicize his views stemmed no doubt from his frontier location. He was a considerable distance from Cambridge and its press, and his duties in a remote community left little time or energy for the construction of treatises for publication. Yet, after 1700, Stoddard found the time, and in the last thirty years of his life he proved to be one of New England's most prolific writers.

The most likely reason for Stoddard's early silence was that his ideas were generating sufficient controversy in the cluster of settlements around Northampton and within his own congregation so that he had little time or inclination to find new adversaries. He was surrounded by ministers less than sympathetic to his position and who, like Edward Taylor of Westfield, expended considerable energy trying to convince Stoddard of his errors.

Taylor's notebook contains numerous references to Stoddard's ideas and indicates that Taylor engaged Stoddard in a continuing doctrinal debate during those years. Taylor, a moderate Congregationalist, abhorred Stoddard's Presbyterianism and may well have disliked the man as well. Relations between the two were strained from the beginning of Taylor's ministry (1673). At the time of his arrival Westfield had no formally organized church, and Taylor worked hard to establish one. The problem was a lack of the "better sort" of person; that is, persons of esteem in their communities and of known godliness and piety. At Westfield's request, the Northampton church had effected settlement in Westfield of several of Northampton's most eminent residents. In July, 1673, Taylor wrote Stoddard asking for David Wilton, a Northampton man of considerable stature and one of the original members of that church. Taylor informed Stoddard that with the addition of Wilton the church at Westfield could be successfully organized.[12] A few weeks later Stoddard replied in the name of the church and town that, because of poor health, Wilton would not be allowed to leave. Moreover, he went on, Northampton had already contributed several of its leading figures and could ill afford the loss of a man of Wilton's stature. He suggested that Westfield contact another church.[13]

Stoddard's letter drew an angry reply from Taylor, who argued that without Wilton his people would be forced to continue without a formal church. He told Stoddard bluntly that he and his church knew of no reason why Wilton could not be spared from Northampton and implied that Northampton's recalcitrance was highly offensive to Westfield and the other churches in the Valley. But, despite Taylor's plea, Wilton remained in Northampton and Westfield continued without a church.[14]

The second encounter between the two divines occurred during the actual formation of the Westfield church in 1679. That confrontation was one of doctrinal differences, yet was no doubt heightened by the earlier disagreement. Stoddard presided at Taylor's ordination and angered Taylor by welcoming the new church--that is, by extending the right hand of fellowship--in the name of the elders rather than the churches. Such was clearly a Presbyterian practice and it goaded Taylor into using his ordination sermon to attack Presbyterianism and to defend what he considered to be the traditional way of the New England churches. The sermon, entitled "A Particular Church is Gods House," emphasized the congregational view of the peculiar nature of the individual church brought about by its covenant relationship with God. Each congregation was a distinct unit, he argued, whose legitimacy and authority stemmed directly from God. He denounced the

Presbyterian argument that a particular church was but an extension of the national church and that its authority stemmed from Christ through the eldership.

Taylor also directly attacked Stoddard by emphasizing the need for purity in God's church. The members of a church, he thundered, in covenant with God and with one another, needed "visible" holiness "manifested first in a Holy and Regular Life Conversation or saintly behavior, and secondly by an Holy and Regular Confession of the Same...None are to be received and baptized into the church but by a Previous Confession of Faith and Repentance, according to the Custom of the Primitive Church and ours at Present."[15] That was a rather obvious slap at Stoddard's belief that an unregenerate of "good conversation" had a right to church membership and to the Lords Supper.

Taylor was not the only ministerial protagonist Stoddard faced in the environs of the Connecticut Valley. At nearby Hadley was one of the veterans of the Connecticut battles of earlier years, John Russell. Russell, one of the "Presbyterians" of the 1650's, maintained his exalted conception of ministerial authority in his later years and sided with Stoddard in denouncing the highly emotional narratives of conversion experience given by the seven pillars of the Westfield church in 1679. Yet, by 1680 Russell was to be numbered among Stoddard's opponents in the

Valley. Like Taylor, he opposed Stoddard's notion that an upright life was the only qualification needed to gain admission to the church and to full communion. In 1681, Russell wrote to Increase Mather to report on Stoddard's activities and to show his disgust not only for Stoddard but for all those who sought to deviate from the doctrine espoused by the synod of 1662. "Our good Brother Stoddard," wrote Russell, "hath bin strenuously promoting his position concerning the right which persons sound in the doctrine of faith, as of (as he calls it) a holy Conversation, have to full Communion." It was time, he continued, for the members of the synod of 1662 to defend the fourth proposition[16] "for the securing of the churches from pollutions by unprepared ones incroaching upon full communion in the Lords Supper and voting...The doctrine of those propositions in the Synod 62 doth tend in the end of the workd...to shake and undermine the fundamentall doctrine and Practise of the Congregationall Way, viz. that Visible Saints are only matter of church of Christ (sic)."[17]

Most of Stoddard's early years, however, were spent in an attempt to convince his own congregation of the wisdom of his views. The first residents of his community were former citizens of Windsor and Hartford who left their old homes during the struggles of the 1650's. In 1660 another group settled in

Northampton, having come from Dorchester, Massachusetts, with Northampton's first minister, Eleazer Mather, in 1661. The years of Mather's ministry were marred by a continuing debate over the Half-Way Covenant. A considerable number of members and non-members were for it, but Mather was not, and he prevented its adoption. But, in 1668 with Eleazer near death, the church moved for its adoption and it carried.[18]

But the church did more than simply adopt the Half-Way Covenant. It instituted what it called a "reformation." Both church and pastor were dissatisfied with the discipline adopted at the initial arganization and sought a second time to bring the practices of the church into conformity with the prevailing notions of the country.[19] The resulting polity was a model of moderate Congregationalism. In addition to the Half-Way Covenant, the members adopted a new and enlarged church covenant, which spelled out in greater detail the duties and obligations of members. Special emphasis was placed on the congregation's duty toward children of the church and special provisions were adopted for their care and edification. Also, the church sought to extend its watch to cover persons baptized in the Northampton church who remained non-members. Those persons were allowed to enter a special "state of education" where they would be watched over and catechized until such time as they could meet requirements for full communion.[20]

Moreover, the church stated its agreement with all of the conclusions of the synod of 1662. "This church having perused the result of the late Synod in the year '62...we see not by any light from God's word to with hold now our consent and approbation touching what is contained in those Synodical conclusions to the sum and substance thereof." Particular emphasis was placed on the two most important conclusions of the synod; the Half-Way Covenant and the consociation of churches. Having already adopted the former, the church turned to the latter and noted that the church "affirms its belief in the principle of '62 regarding consociation of churches as being sound doctrine."[21] The church also reaffirmed its earlier position on admission to full communion. A "relation of experience" was required of all prospective members. That relation was to reveal the "special worke of Gods Grace" on the individual and was to be given (form not specified) before the whole congregation and submitted for their approval.

Finally, the church adopted a profession of faith "extracted from God's holy word by their Pastor." The profession adopted was a mirror of Thomas Hooker's old position. The definition of the "visible saint" was the same as spelled out in the Survey of Church Discipline. "Visible beleevers are such," said the Northampton church, "who haveing a competency of knowledge and a blameless life and by makeing a Profession of holiness, are vissibly and seemingly in the Judgment of charity the seed of Christ." True to the moderate tradition the profession recognized the wide gulf between the visible and invisible churches and that hypocrites were bound to appear among the membership. "Ecclesiastical consideration is distinct from that Covenant made with the mysticall body of Christ in their effectuall [oblit.], that being invissible and [oblit.] only between God and the soul, this vissible and open, and betweene such as professe the faith of Jesus. In as much all the Spirituall seeds of Christ are not in Church Covenant, in which many are who prove Apostated, and never had invisible faith." Yet, having made this admission of fallibility the statement emphasized that hypocrites were "not to bee tollerated in the church."[22]

The profession also explicitly stated the church's feelings on the nature of the Lord's Supper. That article was a reaffirmation of the doctrine of the "Seals" and announced that only regenerates were to be allowed to partake of the Supper; that the Supper was a seal of the covenant between God and his people through Christ, and that it was instituted as a celebration as well as a means for the transference of grace to those already having experienced the initial throes of regeneration. "The Lord's Supper," the church stated, "ought not to be administered to all the members of the Church but to those amongst them only as are induod [sic] with such a measure of divine knowledge (o) spirituall affection (p) [oblit.] of Repentance (q) faith, love and now obedience, as they may feed on Christ Sprititually in the eateing of his flesh, and drinking of his blood for their Spirituall nourishment, and furtherance of their comfort and growth in grace."[23]

Such was the ecclesiastical constitution adopted by Northampton on the eve of its calling of a new pastor. How the church's new discipline differed from old practices (except for the Half-Way Covenant) was not specified in the records. But one thing was readily apparent. The new practices of the church were diametrically opposed to many of the notions of the man who would replace Eleazer Mather.[24]

Stoddard assumed the Northampton pulpit in 1669 and, though not yet ordained, began to agitate for alteration in the church's ecclesiastical constitution. He was ordained in September, 1672. Two months later he achieved limited success when the church agreed to alter its stance toward children of the church. Since 1668, baptized children had been placed in a "state of education" until such time as they could present themselves for admission by public profession. However, in November, 1672, the church agreed to a significant liberalization of membership requirements by allowing children of the church automatic membership upon reaching the age of majority. "Such as grow up to adult age in the church shall present themselves to the Elders," the Church affirmed, "and if they be found to understand and assent unto the doctrine of faith, not to be scandalous in life, and willing to subject themselves to the government of Christ in this Church, shall publickly own the Covenant and be acknowledged members of this church."[25] It was a momentous event for a church which had, only four years earlier, shown such concern with bringing its practices into conformity with the general practices of the country. In one day the Half-Way Covenant was abolished, and a significant group of potential members was released from the obligation of relating an experience of conversion before the congregation.

Stoddard probably hoped for more. If he did he was disappointed, for the policy of his church remained unchanged for the next eighteen years. During that time Stoddard no doubt placed his entire church in a "state of education;" urging them to accept the Presbyterianism he so ardently advocated. How many times Stoddard attempted to force alterations is not known.[26] In 1690 he gained more limited success. During the winter of that year Stoddard offered two motions to the church. First, he called for the abolition of a public profession of religious experience in order "to bring all to the Lords Supper that had a knowledge of Principles of Religion, and not Scandalous by open Sinfull Living." Second, he asked the church to approve his notion that the Lords Supper was a converting ordinance. His attempts were not recorded in the Northampton records but were recorded, instead, by Edward Taylor in his notebook. Stoddard was successful on his first motion and the public profession--a church practice for thirty years--was abolished. Next, Taylor noted, Stoddard preached a sermon from Galations 3.1 "that the Lords Supper was a converting Ordinance" but to no avail. The second motion was defeated by a small majority. As testimony to Stoddard's effectiveness in the arts of persuasion, Taylor noted that the younger members of the church fully supported him but the older ones, including the Ruling Elders, voted against him.[27]

However, Stoddard's dream of his church becoming a model of the "Instituted" Presbyterian church was not to be realized. The church retained its covenant, as well as a half-way status for baptized adults not reared in the community. Members continued to be designated as being in "full communion." And, perhaps most important, the brethren maintained an equal voice in matters of doctrine and discipline, a situation which was anathema to Stoddard's authoritarian Presbyterianism. Moreover, the church never gave official sanction to his notion of the Lords Supper as a converting ordinance. Yet, Stoddard was not without further victories. In 1714, his church endorsed the formation of the Hampshire Association of ministers and acknowledge the validity of a national church in covenant with God; one in which local congregations recognized that, in some areas, their power was subordinate to the powers of "ecclesiastical councils." Also, the church agreed to bring all baptized persons in the town under the discipline of the church regardless of whether they had ever owned the covenant.[28] By that vote the Northampton church endorsed a form of Presbyterianism known to inhabitants of the Valley for many decades. It was not, however, Stoddard's Presbyterianism.

For those reasons, perhaps, Stoddard chose to avoid publishing his views before 1700. This is not to say, however, that he was unknown outside the circle of towns in the upper Connecticut Valley. Increase Mather's diary and letters provide abundant evidence that he, and others, were only too aware of him from about 1677 on. He was recognized as a Presbyterian, advocating synodical government instead of congregational autonomy, rule by elder rather than by the "fraternity," a more liberal definition of the "visible saint" and a relaxation of membership requirements, baptism for all who desired it, a "parish church" in which the discipline of the church would be extended over the whole community, and other doctrines associated with Presbyterianism. In addition, it was known that he held a peculiar notion of the sacraments as converting ordinances.[29]

More important, perhaps, it was also known why Stoddard was such an ardent Presbyterian at a time when the Valley ministry was attempting to downgrade ecclesiastical differences in order to bring about a "reformation" in New England. Stoddard had not publically proclaimed his reasons for deviating from his fellow clergy, yet he willingly gave them to all who asked as he did in 1687 in a letter to Edward Taylor. Taylor had written an urgent note to Stoddard asking for a full justification of the latter's desire to open the Lords Supper to "all above fourteen years of age, that live morally, and having Catechisticall knowledge of the Principalls of Religion."[30] He argued that Stoddard's notion was held by no one else in New England and was a dangerous apostasy which would lead to the pollution of the churches. Taylor also noted what others probably knew as well; that Stoddard's ideas, while new to New England, were not new to the history of Reformed thought. Taylor appealed to the history of the Reformation to try to change Stoddard's mind, arguing that "you having so few of the Non-Conformists for you, and therefor it is a thing well to be suspected."[31]

Stoddard's reply explained why he believed as he did. It showed that not only did he not share the prevailing conceptions of the nature of the sacraments but that, in searching for the reasons for the "decay" of religion in the country, he had come to reject the accepted explanations of the clergy of both Connecticut and Massachusetts. He could not, he countered, blame all on a contentious spirit among the people and the Lord's wrath therefrom nor could he absolve the ministry of blame, as had been the practice of synods for twenty years. Rather, he continued, it was his belief that the clergy were solely responsible for the present dismal state of religion in the country. The decay of the land was the direct result of the adoption of the wrong ecclesiastical system in the beginning. New England had failed to "attend the Will of God in this matter," and her present unhappy condition was the direct result of God's vengeance against his people. He, Stoddard, felt that he had discovered God's will in the matter, that the Presbyterian notions he advocated were, in truth, the elements of God's plan for New England. "I judge that it is the Cause of God," he concluded, "and am therefore under Pressures of Spirit in all Regular Wayes to promote it."[32]

In that manner Stoddard revealed what he considered to be his mission in the Connecticut Valley and in New

England. He sought to alter competely the debate over New England's decline, to show that decline for what it was, to show why it had happened and to provide a way out. The alleged decline, he argued, was simply a euphemism for the clergy's loss of power; another way of saying that the people were no longer obeying the commands of their leaders but were doing as they pleased. Why had that happened? Because, Stoddard continued, the founders of New England had mistakenly adopted Congregationalism as the polity of their churches and what was Congregationalism but a form of government which placed power in the hands of the people. The clergy had done that, he went on, then were shocked and dismayed when the people began to demand the right to exercise the power given them. And why shouldn't they, Stoddard explained? What fools were the founders to think that they and their successors could control the churches of the land when their own notions of polity decreed otherwise. How could they exercise leadership when the theory they espoused made them the instruments of their congregations, forced by sheer weight of numbers to do their bidding. That was the source of New England's "decay." The theory of Congregationalism had been made reality by the brethren, and, in the process, had spilled over into other areas of society. The thirst for power in the churches had become a thirst for power in government as well. The people were revolting against traditional authority in whatever form it appeared.

What was the solution, Stoddard asked? Certainly not reformation covenants or attempts to patch up the Cambridge Platform! The solution lay in the New England clergy's recognition of its basic mistake; the assumption that congregational polity conformed to the mind of God. The Reformation, he argued, had always been led by the clergy. God had revealed his truths to the likes of Calvin, Luther, and Knox, not to ignorant laymen. Who, then, could really believe that God had intended the reformed church to be controlled by the laity when the clergy were, and had always been, God's spokesmen on earth. Presbyterianism was the true Reformed polity. Presbyterianism conformed to the Will of God. The decay of New England would end when Congregationalism was destroyed and Presbyterianism implemented in its place. Only at the time when ultimate authority was vested in the clergy would the people's lust for power be stopped and anarchy averted.

That was Stoddard's message to New England throughout much of his fifty-odd years of ministry at Northampton. It was a product of centuries of Reformed debate yet, at the same time, it was the unique product of the situation in the Connecticut Valley in the late seventeenth century. Stoddard was a Presbyterian because the times called for it. The clergy had lost most of its authority in the society and would not regain it as long as clergymen clung to those notions responsible for their demise. How could they expect to reacquire power when they continued to adhere to a polity which placed power in the hands of the people. For that reason and no other, Stoddard proclaimed himself New England's Presbyterian messiah and, in the process, infuriated his Congregational opponents.

His mission, as he saw it, was not simply to debate his adversaries, but to destroy them. His was a call for total war and, recognized as such, it prompted the leader of the moderate Congregationalists, Increase Mather, to use every possible occasion to snipe at Stoddard and to try to alert his colleagues to the dark purposes of the Northampton divine. It was that which caused him to engage Stoddard in a pamphlet warfare consuming most of the energies of both men during the first decade of the eighteenth century. Mather knew the strength of the Presbyterian tradition in the Connecticut Valley. He and other Massachusetts clergy had feared that the problems of the Connecticut churches would overflow into the rest of New England. He and his colleagues had applauded the apparent unity of the Valley ministry after the

Synod of 1676 while knowing that doctrinal schism remained. Now came a man who sought to spread the struggle by tying the success of failure of Presbyterianism to the essence of God's mission for his new Israel; a man who wought to unite the Presbyterians of the Valley in a renewal of old conflicts.

What made Stoddard truly frightening to Mather and others, however, was that he openly proclaimed holy war on Congregationalism. He unabashedly announced that his struggle would not be confined to the Valley but would be directed to all areas of New England, including the Bay, and would not end until one of the combatants was vanquished. Stoddard argued that the entire ecclesiastical history of New England was a succession of mistakes and that religion would not thrive until those mistakes were rectified and Congregationalism replaced by Presbyterianism in the churches. The greatest of those mistakes, he wrote often, was the Cambridge Platform and its endorsement of the "power of the fraternity." "The mistakes of one Generation," he lamented, "many times become the calamity of succeeding generations. The present generation are not only unhappy by reason of the darkness of their own minds, but the errors of those who have gone before them have been a foundation to a great deal of Misery. Posterity is very prone to espouse the principles of Ancestors, and from an inordinate Veneration of them, to apprehend a sacredness in their opinions, and don't give themselves the trouble to make an impartial Examination of them, as if it were a transgression to call them into question, and bordered upon Irreligion to be wavering about them..."[33] Stoddard called those "principles" to account, found them responsible for New England's woes, and demanded their abolition. Little wonder Mather consistently referred to Stoddard's "Design against our Churches," and his "Plot of undermining the Churches" and accused him of being guilty of "antichristian Depravation Apostasy."[34]

Stoddard's "Design" reached the reading public of New England in 1700 with the London publication of his first and only comprehensive treatise on church polity, The Doctrine of the Instituted Churches.[35] It was not a long treatise, yet it contained all of the essentials of his position and showed quite clearly what Edward Taylor had suggested some years before, that he was considerably removed from the main tenets of Reformed divinity. Whereas the thrust of the Reformation was toward primitive Christianity, Stoddard argued for a church encompassing both Old and New Testaments. He rejected many of the essentials of both the Protestant and Roman Catholic traditions because each based notions of polity on the supposed nature of the early Church. Roman Catholicism argued that authority passed from Christ to Peter thus justifying the existence of an authoritarian church centered around papal power. The Congregationalist tradition argued that the authority of Christ passed to the early congregations of Rome, Antioch, and elsewhere as autonomous units. Hence, the true church was the particular congregation of true believers in which decisions were made by the members. The Presbyterians argued that Christ's authority passed to the Apostles and that those men formed the first consistory of elders. The modern clergyman, they argued, was the descendant of those early "ministers" and possessed ultimate authority in Christ's visible church.

Stoddard's position was alien to all of those traditions. The reformed churches sought the purity of the primitive Christian church. He too, he argued, sought purity but he denied that it was to be found in the early church. God's church, he argued, formed a continuum from Old to New Testaments, and if one sought the restoration of the "pure" church, one looked first at the polity of God's church among the ancient Israelites. There was to be found the institutionalization of God's power and authority on earth. It was his original church, and for reformers interested in discovering God's will in the matters of church government, it was the only real source.

According to Stoddard, the church of Israel was an "instituted" church in that it was created, or instituted, by God for the salvation of men. But what form did that salvation assume? Stoddard's analysis suggested that God made a covenant with the Israelites that if they lived according to his law they would be saved. Thus, the salvation of the Old Testament was external and to be found only in obedience to the moral law. Christ's death, however, changed the rules for man's salvation, for in death Christ atoned for the sins of man. As his life had been a model of how man should live, so his death atoned for man's iniquities. No longer would man find salvation in obedience to the Law. Now it would come only through faith in Christ's mission on earth. Christ had interceded with God on man's behalf; had become mankind's barrister before the bar of Divine justice. Christ had given his life to prove his sincerity and, for man to reap the fruits of Christ's selflessness, he only had to accept Christ as his sole hope for salvation.

In Stoddard's view man was, of course, powerless to affect his own salvation. Such was the sole prerogative of the Almighty. But how then was grace conveyed from God to man? Stoddard's answer was the sacraments of the Instituted church. Those, he argued, were Christ's legacy to man and, as a consequence, the real historical significance of primitive Christianity. Christ died for the sins of mankind and, simultaneously, provided the means of his redemption. He ordained the

Holy Sacraments--baptism, prayer, scripture, preaching, censure, the Lord's Supper--as the institutional means of man's redemption. Christ created those sacraments and gave them spiritual power solely for man's salvation.

This, then, was a significant portion of Stoddard's complaint against the churches of New England, and against much of the Reformed tradition as well. Too much time was spent worrying about the precise form of the primitive Christian church. Such a quest was, by Stoddard's definition, irrelevant, for the church of Israel, not that of primitive Christianity, possessed the form of government conforming to God's will. The significance of primitive Christianity was not disciplinary but doctrinal. That, he was convinced, was the true nature of New England's failure for her definition of the sacraments was fallacious. The doctrine of the "pure church" and of the "Seals" was the real cause of God's anger and the country's decline. Christ had intended his sacraments for all men, and New Englanders were, consequently, starving for lack of spiritual nourishment.

Stoddard's conception of the "Instituted" church was thus an amalgamation of Old Testament form with New Testament function. The Church of Israel had been a national church whose reason for existence had not extended beyond the boundaries of the Jewish nation. But, in Christ, God announced that henceforth his kingdom extended over all men. Stoddard's conception of the God of the Old Testament was peculiar for his time in that it postulated a kind of national God who, though responsible for human creation, confined his interest to a particular people. In Christ, however, God announced his fatherhood of mankind; that he was no longer merely the God of Israel but was extending his rule, and his benefits to all men. The form of the Church of Israel was to be retained but the ground rules for salvation were radically altered. Adherence to the moral law was sufficient justification for the Jews--a nation of believers. But God now confronted a multitude of unbelievers knowing nothing of his power or his law. New means were required for their salvation. The Jewish church had existed primarily as a vehicle for divine worship. The new church was that and much more. Its central purpose was evangelistic; the salvation of sinners. To accomplish that end God sacrificed his son for man's sins then "instituted" his church--through the sacraments--to convey the message and the gift to the world.[36]

Stoddard's definition of the "fit matter" for a church--the Visible Saint--proceeded from his definition of the function of the church. There were three churches, he argued. First was the invisible church, encompassing all of the elect and of a composition known only to God. Second was the Visible or "catholic" church which he defined as composed of all professing "the true faith in Christ." Such persons were "Visible Saints" but their sainthood was not defined by salvation or church membership but by a blameless life, a sound knowledge of Christian principles and a sincere desire to close with Christ. Thus, it was altogether possible that a man could be a "Visible Saint" and yet not be a member of any particular congregation.

The third type of church was the "Instituted Church," or the institutional means for the dissemination of grace. The basic problem of such a church was obvious: to bring all professing Christians to the sacraments--the source of Grace--so that they might be saved. Thus, for Stoddard, it was imperative that no obstacles be placed in the path of professing Christians desiring union with the institutional church.[37] He rejected New England's penchant for church purity through tests of regeneration. The sacraments were open to all wanting their benefits. A man who knew himself to be a sinner had as much right to the sacraments as the man who thought himself to be a saint. The reasons for that were threefold in nature: first, Stoddard found no scriptural warrant in either the Old or New Testaments for any practice limiting membership to proven regenerates. Second, he felt a test to be impossible. Only the individual could know his own situation. A minister could help him look for signs of his condition, but no external "test" could be devised to determine the condition of something so intangible as the human soul. Third, and most important, the creation of qualifications for membership was, he argued, contrary to the purposes of the instituted church. Men came to the doors of the church because they sought its saving sacraments and any attempt to keep them out was a flat denial of the very meaning of Christ's death.[38]

Thus Stoddard could not accept the Congregational doctrine of the autonomous congregation as a communion of saints drawn together out of society to worship God and to celebrate the sacraments and bound together, and to God, by a covenant. The particular church, he argued, was but a manifestation of the visible catholic church. Thus, a member of one church was a member of every other church--a member of his Northampton congregation was also a member of the Hadley congregation, and so on. Membership in one church was sufficient to gain admission to all churches.

For Stoddard, as for most Presbyterians, a particular church was defined as a place where "members were bound" by the appointment of God to assemble in one place in a constant way for the celebration of "Publick Worship." Its importance lay in the dispensation of sacraments. Thus its existence was largely a matter of convenience. Particular churches were appointed by

God as places where members of the universal catholic church could come together to celebrate the sacraments. The location, that is, the building or the site or the locale, was a matter of indifference.

As a result, Stoddard continued, there was no need or justification for a particular church covenant. Members were bound together by a simple profession of faith wherein they agreed to obey God's law. In most respects Stoddard's view of the particular church was based on the concept of parish churches. A Christian was a member of the particular church in his community. All that was required was his request for membership for his right was already established.

In the absence of a binding covenant, the authority of the particular church, for Stoddard, came from its membership in the national church. That was, he believed, the essense of the church of ancient Israel--a national unit. God had made a covenant with the Jews and that relationship applied to the Christian church as well. Each Christian nation was in covenant with God, promising obedience to Him in return for his blessing. Each nation thus formed a distinct part of the visible church and, as in the case of the Jewish church, spiritual authority and power flowed from God through the national covenant to the ruling body of the national church and from there to particular churches.

Again basing his argument on the church of the

Israelites, Stoddard argued that the ruling body of the national church should be composed solely of Elders. As to the nature of that rule, however, Stoddard preferred the guidance of "the light of nature" to scripture. The doctrine of independent churches was "too lordly a principle" for him. The experience of New England proved, he argued, that the implementation of such a principle led to ecclesiastical anarchy with congregations working constantly at cross purposes. The instituted church, as he portrayed it, had but a single purpose--the salvation of sinners. Thus, to accomplish its mission, it needed effective coordination of the activities of local churches through a centralized governing body. The "light of nature" suggested to Stoddard that the Church of Scotland was closest to the Old Testament ideal and to God's will.[39]

Here he showed his indebtedness to Samuel Rutherford. Stoddard asserted that ultimate authority in the national church ought to be invested in a synod composed of all Elders of the churches, or if the nation was too large, of a few Elders representing all the churches. The power of that national synod was as specific as it was all-pervasive. The synod was to have full authority in the determination and dissemination of sound doctrine, and, conversely, in the fight against error and heresy. It was, also, to be totally responsible for discipline. It was to judge complaints and inflict ecclesiastical censures when necessary. Finally, it was to oversee the training and placement of ministers, appointing groups of Elders to examine each prospective minister to determine proper qualifications.

To facilitate the government of particular churches Stoddard urged that the national church be subdivided into provinces with each province controlled by a body of elders immediately subordinate to the national synod. In turn, each province was to be divided into a number of classes; bodies composed of Elders whose duties it would be to implement, on the local level, the decisions of the national synod.[40]

In turning to the power and structure of the local church, Stoddard argued that the minister and ruling Elders were to have complete authority in matters of doctrine and discipline. Those officers formed a "presbytery" with total control over church affairs, total because the minister's power was derived from God through the national covenant and the hierarchical structure of the government. But Stoddard, like most New England Presbyterians, could not totally escape Congregational theory. The brethren, he concluded, were not without rights. They had the power to choose their own rulers, and thus they had a considerable power in deciding church affairs. Why had they such power in a scheme where power flowed from national church to particular church? By way of an answer, Stoddard adopted a rationale alien to Presbyterian theory and anathema to his own authoritarianism, yet necessary in the Connecticut Valley. All free societies, he concluded, had the right to choose their own rulers, for the "power over men in a free society comes from the consent of the people."[41] That notion, though absurd in Stoddard's "Instituted" church, was his acknowledgement of the dynamics of his own society.

The sacraments of the church were to be administered by the minister whose prerogative it was to decide who would be admitted and who would not. Baptism was to be open to any person, infant or adult, who was a "visible saint." Membership in a particular church was not a prerequisite, nor was it necessary for the applicant to have been the child or grandchild of a member. The prerequisites for communion were much the same. A prospective member need only be a "visible saint," to "walk blamelessly" and "profess faith in Christ." Yet Stoddard did have a second condition: the prospective communicants were to "have knowledge to examine themselves and discern the Lord's body." That latter qualification barred infants from the Table and meant that before a person would be admitted to the Lords Supper, he would have to first show sufficient wisdom and understanding--maturity--to be able to recognize the grace of God should it come to him. Thus did Stoddard believe in a modified "test" for each applicant, but it was a test designed to measure maturity not regeneration.[42]

The Doctrine of Instituted Churches was answered immediately. Its chief critic was Increase Mather, pastor of Boston's Second Church and self-styled apologist for the "New England Way.". Mather and Stoddard had sparred with one another for over twenty years, yet neither divine had shown any inclination to pursue differences via the press. However, in the 1690's Stoddard began to apply pressure and press his views more vociferously. Increase, and son Cotton, reacted accordingly. Their initial response was to attack all Presbyterians in New England, and in so doing, tended to adopt a line of logic similar to Stoddard's. The Northampton divine argued that congregational polity was the root of all the problems of New England. The Mathers stated the reverse. The spread of Presbyterianism was the source of all evil.[43]

In a real sense, the Mathers helped complete what Stoddard had begun--the destruction of the rationalizations behind the old Jeremiad psychology. For decades clergymen in both Massachusetts and Connecticut had argued that the wickedness of the people was the source of God's controversy with New England. They had attempted to subdue internal differences over polity in order to present a common front in a massive attack on the ills of the brethren. They were largely successful in the creation of a superficial harmony but were quite unsuccessful in curing the ills of the land. Stoddard spoke directly to that failure and argued that no successes were attainable until the clergy assumed the burden of guilt by admitting that Congregationalism--the polity of the majority--was the real source of their difficulties. The Mathers argued the opposite. Congregationalism, they said, was not the bane of the people but the source of their strength. Presbyterianism was the source of evil, and Stoddard was the purveyor of Presbyterianism.

To prove that Presbyterianism was a stranger to the land and the obvious source of social, political, and ecclesiastical discord, it was first necessary to assess the thoughts and motives of the founding fathers. That was at least part of Cotton Mather's intent in the publication of his Magnalia Christi Americana in 1702. Clearly a polemic against Presbyterianism and especially Stoddard, it attempted to prove, through vignettes of the great ecclesiastical lights of New England, that the founders of the colony and their progeny had been of a single mind regarding polity--moderate Congregationalism. The Magnalia portrayed such men as Cotton, Hooker, Shepard, and Wilson as coming to New England to escape persecution with the singular notion of creating Congregational churches. Moreover, Mather's portraits of the leading divines to 1690 sought to show a remarkable adherence to the doctrines and practices of the first generation. There were, Mather assured his readers, no significant differences among divines of New England from 1630 to 1690. All was peace and harmony. Even the great Connecticut disputes of mid-century were explained away. Mather devoted some time to them--he could not avoid it--but he portrayed them as minor, isolated disagreements usually centering around petty local problems. In the Hartford dispute, where the sources of discord were fairly obvious, Mather announced he had found no underlying cause and assumed it to have been such a petty matter as to have slipped from men's minds.[44]

He used the same approach in reciting the facts of the lives of certain divines whose "orthodoxy" appeared questionable. Such men as Thomas Parker and John Woodbridge of Newbury, Massachusetts; Samuel Stone of Hartford; John Russell of Wethersfield; John Warham of Windsor; even John Davenport of New Haven, emerged as essentially mindless. Mather emphasized their piety, or their effectiveness as preachers, or their stature among their people. But, in the galaxy of New England's greats, their careers, though glorious, were definitely lackluster in comparison to Cotton, Hooker, Norton, Mitchell, Shepard, and Wilson.[45]

Thus, in Mather's view, the ecclesiastical history of New England through much of the seventeenth century was characterized by domestic tranquility produced by an unswerving adherence to Congregational discipline. But, he lamented, in the last decade of the century, certain foolish "younger" divines (Stoddard was nearly sixty by this time) began to flirt with dangerous notions. Presbyterianism, heretofore alien in the rarified New England atmosphere, began making inroads among the young. A "great design" arose--with Stoddard presumably at the helm--to destroy the purity and, of course, the tranquility of the New England churches. Already it had met with some success. The existence of Presbyterianism had led to an increase in worldliness, disrespect for authority and a host of similar problems all contributing to a general decay of religious interest among the populace. God was now showing his wrath toward his people for breaking with his--and New England's--"way," and unless Presbyterianism was uprooted immediately New England would fall.[46]

Cotton Mather thus accepted much of Stoddard's explanation of the country's "decay." Congregationalists and Presbyterians alike now had abundant proof that New England's demise was not the result of the wickedness of the people but of errors of the ministry. The source of all problems lay with the unresolved struggle between Presbyterians and Congregationalists.

New England, both sides argued, would not be restored to God's favor, would know no tranquility or harmony and would not flourish again until all differences were settled in the complete victory of one or the other disciplines.

Thus the New England clergy began to return to the position of their colleagues of the 1650's and 1660's. The people were not responding to the leadership of the ministry, and authority was under attack at all levels of society. For an explanation of their dilemma the ministers could think only in terms of competing ideologies; that they were still plagued by the theological and ecclesiastical battles their ancestors had left English homes to escape. They and their laymen, they assumed, were yet besieged by the ideological divisions of the Protestant Reformation, particularly those of English nonconformity. Once again the clergy sought to resolve those disputes. In Massachusetts the attempt assumed the form of a heated controversy between Stoddard and the Mathers. In Connecticut it took the form of renewed frenzy for an ecclesiastical constitution. In both colonies the ministers appeared full of new confidence that what they thought or did could and would have a profound impact on the hearts of the people, but the people would dash those hopes just as they had dashed the hopes of clergymen a half century before.

V

The Great Debate--and After

Solomon Stoddard's proclamation of war against Congregationalism in 1700 in The Doctrine of the Instituted Churches initiated a decade of pamphleteering between the adherents of Congregationalist and Presbyterian polities; the first time such differences had reached the New England reading public via the printing press.[1] Stoddard and Increase Mather were the major protagonists while most other contributors tended to merely imitate their arguments. An exception was John Wise who, in 1717, wrote the Vindication of the Churches, a systematic defense of rigid Congregationalism and the only such defense to appear during the debate. Wise's treatise attacked all points of view in the controversy, especially Mather's insistence that his own peculiar Congregationalism was the traditional "Way" of the New England churches.[2] From the other side, both Stoddard's Presbyterianism and Mather's Congregationalism were countered in a 1700 treatise written by Timothy Woodbridge, Benjamin Colman, and Simon Bradstreet, entitled Gospel Order Revived.[3] Created ostensibly as a reply from New England's Presbyterians to Increase Mather's Order of the Gospel (1700),[4] it also attempted to disassociate the authors from Stoddard by claiming that his "Instituted" church was not the church of most New England Presbyterians.

For the most part the major points of disagreement were delineated in 1700, the first year of the controversy. Only Wise's treatise in 1712 and a republication by Mather in 1701 of a pamphlet written by an English Presbyterian[5] added any new dimensions to the argument, and Wise's statement came after most of the combatants had more or less retired from the field. Stoddard's Instituted Churches, Mather's Order of the Gospel, and Woodbridge, Colman, and Bradstreet's Gospel Order Revived all appeared within a few months of each other in 1700 and set the pattern for a decade of heated ministerial arguments.

New England had never witnessed such a display by her ministry. Public disputes had occurred before, some had even appeared in print, but none had involved so many different ministers from such diverse parts of the country.[6] The land was shaken by the clerical furor and bewildered laymen vainly sought an explanation for the din. The explanation lay deeply embedded in the arguments of the clergy; a feeling of frustration and deep sense of impending disaster for the country unless drastic measures were taken. For five decades they had watched those solutions fail to effect the desired "reformation" bringing instead only more declension and wider doctrinal divisions. Consistent failure produced frustration; frustration which was compounded, in turn, by a sense of the waning power and prestige of the ministerial position. Each time the clergy tried and failed, its influence declined accordingly.

Fundamental to the arguments of the debaters were certain common assumptions about the nature of the good society. The good society prized order and harmony above all things, cherished the public good--as determined by proper authority--above private goods, and respected and obeyed properly constituted authority, whether civil or ecclesiastical. Equally fundamental was the feeling that such a society no longer was to be found in any of the colonies of New England and that they, the ministers, were primarily responsible.

If the clergymen blamed themselves for New England's sad condition, they also saw themselves as responsible for its salvation. But to save the country required ecclesiastical power, and the clergy was painfully aware of its lack of influence among the brethren. Moreover, to attain--or retain--that influence and to wield it for the country's benefit required the achievement of several objectives; the end of anticlericalism and the return of respect for the ministerial function among the brethren, and the creation of some institution through which the clergy could wield its collective power for the reformation of the land. Neither of these objectives could be achieved, however, until the ministers dealt with the cause of their waning power and the country's decline, their own ideological split over questions of doctrine and discipline.

All of this was thoroughly discussed in the ministerial debate; the clergy's role in bringing ruin to the country, the points of doctrine and discipline separating the ministers, the ways to resolve such differences, and the methods to be utilized to restore the collective power and authority of the clergy. Taking the extreme positions were Stoddard and Mather. Mather argued that all problems stemmed from Presbyterian deviations from New England's Congregational orthodoxy and that power would naturally return to the clergy once the innovators were destroyed. Stoddard placed the blame on Congregationalism, arguing that the Cambridge Synod's decision to place ecclesiastical power in the hands of the less than capable brethren was the real source of New England's woe. He called for the abolition of Congregationalism and the creation of a powerful ruling synod of ministers. The arguments of other clergy fell somewhere between Stoddard and Mather.

The debate was no idle exercise in ministerial rhetoric, nor was it simply the culmination of a long smoldering feud between two petulant divines. The future of the country was at stake, or so the ministers believed, and their arguments were tinged with a sense of urgency which lifted the debate far above the plane of idle speculation. The participants warned their readers of Armageddon and issued a call to action to the clergy which made every minister, no matter how remote his station, an indispensable force in the salvation of the land. Moreover, the debate was made doubly important by the fact that, while they fought their public battles, clergymen in both colonies worked quietly to bring their thoughts to fruition through a synod. Thus, in a real sense, the debate was a rehearsal of the arguments and solutions to be presented in private meetings and was designed to create enthusiasm for those meetings. Massachusetts' efforts, directed largely by Increase Mather, proved unsuccessful but the work of the Connecticut clergy resulted in the Saybrook Platform of Church Discipline (1708).

Increase Mather's Order of the Gospel opened the debate. It was a general attack on New England Presbyterianism but focused specifically on the founders of Boston's Brattle Street Congregational Church (1698) and, to a lesser extent, on Stoddard.[7] Mather assumed that the views of the Bostonians and Stoddard were identical and proceeded to refute them on three levels. First, he argued they were not real Presbyterians at all but were charlatans hiding their evil designs against the churches of New England behind a respectable polity. Presbyterianism was respectable, he continued, because the declaration of the United Brethren of London of 1690--

an amalgamation of English Presbyterians and Congregationalists--had shown basic agreement among those groups on many "fundamentals" of discipline. Their declaration conformed to his own moderate Congregationalism and he was in total agreement with their position. However, he retorted, New England's "Presbyterians" attacked his position and, in so doing, they attacked the position of true Presbyterianism. Therefore, he concluded, the colonial Presbyterians were frauds and had to be exposed.[8]

The essence of Mather's attack on the Presbyterians was, however, delivered in the context of an analysis of the historical development of the Protestant Reformation and New England's peculiar position in that development. He defined the thrust of the Reformation as the quest for the re-establishment of the polity and purity of the primitive Christian church. The early churches of the Reformation, he argued, rediscovered the essence of the New Testament churches in their adoption of rigorous admission policies and in the maintenance of strict discipline by the laity. "Now that wherein these Churches did Chiefly Excel," he announced, "was their Order, Especially in their great strictness as to Admissions to the Lords Supper."[9]

However, he continued, in time those "pure" churches began to decline as they relaxed entrance standards and congregational discipline and became, consequently, worldly and profane. Such was particularly true of reformed churches in Switzerland, France, and England. To counteract that trend there arose in England and on the continent a new Reformation, one directed not against Papists but against existing reformed churches. A new attempt was made to recapture the essence of primitive Christianity, and it was out of that new attempt that "our fathers" came to the American wilderness to go into "Voluntary Exile" in order to practice their ecclesiastical polity--the correct "Order" of the Gospel--away from the corrupting influences of the Old World.[10]

His third criticism of Presbyterianism concerned the ecclesiastical history of New England. Here Increase adopted the argument developed by Cotton Mather in the Magnalia. New England, he wrote, was founded as a great experiment. One prior attempt had been made to form pure churches in the midst of the corruption and evil of old world society but had failed. Then God had given his people another chance and had revealed to them a new world untouched by European man or his institutions. God told his chosen to go into the new world and create a Holy Commonwealth and told them also that the new society would become a beacon for the reformation of mankind. Thus, Mather concluded, the fathers of New England established their churches in accordance with the congregational purity of the early church and were united in their belief in a divine mission as well as in their belief that Congregationalism was the true "order of the Gospel."[11]

However, he went on, after a time New England also began to decline. Her people grew worldly and profane; grew restless under the rule and guidance of the intellectual descendants of the founders, and, as a result, began to lose God's favor--just as had happened to the Reformed churches of Europe a century before. For years thoughtful New Englanders had sought the cause of God's displeasure; the source of the evil which polluted the New England Canaan. Now he, Increase, could announce to the world the discovery of that source. Just as Cotton had done a few years earlier, Increase pointed to the "Presbyterians" and announced that they were responsible. The reformed churches had initially stumbled because they had rejected congregational order and purity by relaxing discipline and by polluting their memberships through the admission of questionable saints. Now, Mather announced, certain persons were arguing that the churches of New England ought to do the same. The orthodoxy of Congregationalism which had pervaded the New England atmosphere for two generations was being shattered by the introduction of "Presbyterian" doctrines by Stoddard and the group on Brattle Street and each time a church or minister succumbed to these doctrines, Mather warned, the people declined a little more and God showed his wrath through storms, pestilence, drought, and Indian wars.[12] Thus did Mather delineate what he considered to be the fundamental difference between himself--as spokesman for New England's Congregational majority--and the Stoddardean Presbyterians. He argued that religion would thrive only when the country's ecclesiastical constitution was upheld and unsound doctrine driven out. They argued for a new beginning, a recognition that seventy years of strife was ample proof that the "Congregational Way" was not God's way.

Curiously, however, Mather did not list Stoddard's doctrine of the converting ordinances as a dangerous innovation.[13] Seemingly, at the time, he considered Stoddard one of many "false Presbyterians," but not the only one. Several years before he had warned the Northampton clergyman "that if it (Stoddard's book) came abroad, we would as Publickly animadvert upon it." Stoddard's Instituted Churches would appear in New England shortly, and it was probably for that reason that Mather's only direct attack upon the Northampton divine was a rather matter-of-fact statement that "as for that objection that the Sacrament is a Converting Ordinance, and therefore that there is no need of Examining members about their Conversion in order to their being admitted to partake thereof, it is a Popish Assertion."[14]

The Order of the Gospel, however, went beyond a simple attack upon Presbyterianism. It was Mather's response to all deviations from New England's traditional orthodoxy, and that also included Congregationalists who were too "rigid." Here, he seemed to speak more to the laity than to the clergy. For example, in attacking the Presbyterians for being lax in admissions to communion, he also warned against the undue severity of many churches in that regard. He was particularly opposed to the practice found in many areas of forcing prospective members to give a public recitation of their conversion as well as a public defense of that recitation. "To put such upon Publick Declarations of their Experiences," he stormed, "would be to expose Sacred things to be Condemned and Ridiculed by men of profane Spirits."[15] Yet Mather was careful to avoid alienating the laymen in his pursuit of heresay, and he concluded that, basically, his cause was also theirs and that their respective views were really too close for quibbling. The real evil and source of the decay of religion was to be found within the ministry among those--particularly the young--who flirted with the strange doctrines of pseudo-Presbyterianism. "It is not my own cause, but Yours, which I have here undertaken and plead for," he told his readers. "Did I say Yours? Nay, it is Christs Cause. The defense of these Truths is now become the Cause of Christ and of his Churches in New England. I am also very sensible the young Divines, who have not Studied these Controversies, are apt to think, that what has been Ordinarily professed and practised in the Churches of New England, is Novelty and Singularity. It may in that respect be a Service to the Churches that something be written, which may be for the Information and Illumination of such, in Question of this nature?"[16]

If Mather considered his Order of the Gospel as primarily for the "Information and Illumination" of young divines in the traditional "controversies," his air of nonchalance quickly dissipated upon reading Stoddard's Instituted Churches. Mather rushed into print a treatise written some years earlier by an English Presbyterian,[17] John Quick, which refuted Stoddard's position on the sacraments. In his introduction, which was longer than the main text, Mather warned the reader of the danger lurking in the hinterland of Massachusetts. Stoddard endangered the "Happy Union" of the New England churches, he announced, and represented a force more pernicious than all other Presbyterians combined. Compared to the Northampton cleric the members of the Brattle Street group were harmless. Obviously something Mather had read in The Doctrine of Instituted Churches had taken him by complete surprise.[18]

Mather considered all New England Presbyterians to be "Formalists" more interested in promoting polity than piety. The Doctrine of Instituted Churches told him that Stoddard was a "Formalist" of the worst sort for not only did he reject both piety and sanctity, but he trampled on many of the principles of the Protestant Reformation and seemed interested only in seeing the "Enclosures about the Churches demolished, and whatever distinguished them from the wide and wild World Extinguished."[19] This was what proved so shocking to Mather. Stoddard refused to accept what he, Mather, considered the essence of the Reformation: an attempt to distinguish saints from sinners and to create churches composed solely or largely of God's elect. For centuries Papists had polluted Christian doctrine with unsound notions and polluted the churches with known sinners. The Reformation had sought to undo that tangle by studying the New Testament for sound doctrine and practice and imitating the practices of the early Christian churches. Mather was a part of that quest and the doctrine he espoused and the Congregational discipline he upheld were, he believed, its products. Stoddard was simply not of that tradition. He sought no pure church in the pages of the New Testament. Instead, he argued that the discipline that most accorded with God's wishes was the church of the Israelites as described in the Old Testament--a comprehensive, corporate, national church which made only a token attempt to distinguish saints from sinners and which, for Mather, differed little from the corrupt Roman Catholic church Protestants had sought to escape.

Thus, for Increase Mather, speaking for New

England's Congregationalists, Stoddard represented a significantly greater threat to New England than did the Brattle Street group or Presbyterians in general. The latter challenged New England's ecclesiastical system as Mather saw it, but they did so within the framework of reformed theology. Stoddard questioned one of the major themes of the Reformation; the quest for the pure church. "We shall not concern ourselves," Increase announced, "with his Doctrine, That Elders have not only power over their particular Churches, but also over others; and his Essay to Erect Provincial and National Churches, (and these must Consist only of the Clergy) as of Divine Right."[20] He would not concern himself with it, he continued, because even Presbyterian nations rejected it and it would certainly not be acceptable to New Englanders. Instead, he would focus on his scriptural justification for the "Instituted Church," the Old Testament Church of the Israelites. "We see now the fault of our Platform of Church discipline," he concluded, "tis too much compiled out of the books of the New Testament."[21]

Mather opposed Stoddard on the principle that the instituted church ran contrary to reformation doctrine, but he also adopted the argument that the Jewish church was not the national church Stoddard portrayed it to be. In one concise paragraph in his introduction to Quick's treatise Mather touched on both his theological and historical objections to Stoddard's position. "To tell us," he wrote, "that the Constitution of the Church of Isreal and of the Synagogues as particular Churches under it, in the Land of Canaan, is an Institution for the Churches of the New Testament, will rather Astonish than satisfy Considerate Christians...But almost all the Traditions that we have about the Church Government of the Synagogues, are either the Gabulous,[22] or at best, uncertain Reports of the Talmuds, which were not in being, til several Hundreds of years after our Saviour."[23]

But the Jewish church as a model for reformed Christian churches was but half of Stoddard's argument for the "Instituted" church. Stoddard argued that the requirements for man's salvation had been altered since the days of the Israelites from conformity to the Law to faith in Christ's atonement. Thus, from that he drew the inference that Christ had "instituted" the sacraments for the transmission of saving grace but had suggested no deviations from the polity of the church of Israel. Once Mather understood the context from which Stoddard argued for his notion of converting ordinances he hammered at the theme that Stoddard's position was "Papist" and, although upheld by a few early Lutherans, was generally rejected by Protestants because of its similarity to Roman Catholic doctrine. Stoddard's adherence to it--like his argument for a polity based on ancient Jewish practice--made him anathema to New England and its Reformation heritage.[24]

Mather buttressed his attack with evidence that no major Protestant group accepted Stoddard's position. He cited the Heads of Agreement as proof that neither Congregationalists nor Presbyterians deviated from the doctrine of the "Seals."[25] He used Samuel Rutherford as further proof of Presbyterian rejection.[26] Even the Church of England, which in many respects conformed to Stoddard's notion of a national church, would not allow unregenerates to profane the Lord's Table. Finally, he mentioned the traditional practice of the New England churches which was in complete opposition to Stoddard's notion.[27] Stoddard had obviously injected something new into the traditional Congregational-Presbyterian argument. He postulated that the true "primitive" church was the Church of Israel and that its spiritual power stemmed from a national covenant between the people of Israel and their God. He also argued for the doctrine of the converting ordinances and the admission of unregenerates to the Lord's Table. Those latter notions formed the core of his Instituted Church and, consequently, drew the bulk of Mather's fire. All Presbyterians known to the Boston divine--whether in Scotland, England or New England--were, he believed, in sympathy with his description of the essence of the Protestant Reformation. In polity it represented an attempt to recreate primitive Christianity. Doctrinally it sought the same end, rejecting the institutionalized salvation of Roman Catholicism for a more personalized view--that salvation was between God and man and was without earthly mediators. Stoddard rejected both notions. His polity and divinity imitated the institutionalized salvation of Roman Catholicism. Thus Mather rejected Stoddard because Stoddard seemed to reject the Reformation.

There was, however, another reason for Mather's fear of Stoddard for the close proximity between the formation of the Brattle Street church and the appearance of Stoddard's treatise seemed more than coincidence. Mather linked the two and assumed the worst. An elaborate Presbyterian plot, hatched in the Connecticut Valley, was unfolding against New England Congregationalism. Had not Stoddard said as much in his book? Had he not blamed New England's woes on her congregational polity and warned that he would not be silent until the polity he espoused was enshrined as New England's discipline? Consequently, Mather treated Stoddard's book not as the utterance of a single minister but as the war-cry of a horde of Valley Presbyterians. He assumed, as did other ministers, that since Stoddard's was the first truly Presbyterian tract to appear from the pen of a New England minister, he therefore spoke from a solid and widely-spread base of power. How else could he dare attack the Bay establishment unless he could count on the support of the clergy and laymen of the Valley? Thus, Mather filled his preface to Quick's treatise with dire warnings of the "Presbyterianism that runs down the Connecticut River."[28] He attacked Samuel Rutherford, whom he saw as fashionable among the younger Valley clergy, and reminded them that one of their forebears had thoroughly refuted Rutherford's notions. "You our Brethren in the Colony of Connecticut," he warned, "that Exceed all the rest of New England for proclaiming your Indiposition to the Order wherein your Churches have so long flourished, wilt above others attend; Because t'was Rutherford that was against your Thomas Hooker, whom though he were (with your leave) the greatest man that ever your Colony saw, yet now the most Raw Youths amongst you can...Confute him!"[29]

To counteract the apparent conspiracy from Connecticut, Mather marshalled the support of some Boston clergy and appended to the Quick pamphlet yet another document, a note from eight other ministers commending Quick's treatise as well as the position of the United Brethren and denouncing Stoddard and all who followed him. Included among the signers was a very old John Higginson of Salem who, forty years before while still a minister in Connecticut, had issued a similar denunciation against another Valley maverick, Samuel Stone of Hartford.[30]

The "Presbyterianism that runs down the Connecticut River" was not long in replying to Mather's attack. Soon after the publication of Stoddard's Instituted Church, Mather's Order of the Gospel, and Quick's Young Man's Claim, there appeared a fourth treatise entitled The Gospel Order Revived, published anonymously in New York because, according to the authors, Mather's influence over the press prevented its appearance in Boston. The tract was thoroughly Presbyterian and purported to be a point by point refutation of Mather's Order of the Gospel. Surprisingly, it was also an oblique attack on Stoddard as well. The Northampton divine's name was not mentioned but little doubt was left in the reader's mind that the author or authors were not in sympathy with his position.

The authors were three in number; Benjamin Colman of the Brattle Street church, Simon Bradstreet of Charlestown and Timothy Woodbridge of the First Church in Hartford. Of the three Woodbridge was the oldest in years and in length of service. Son of John Woodbridge, long time minister of Newbury, Massachusetts, Timothy came from New England's most distinguished Presbyterian family. John Woodbridge and his uncle, Thomas Parker, also a minister through much of the seventeenth century, were widely known for their

Presbyterian leanings. The sons of John, and of his brother Benjamin, also became Presbyterians. Several of them found positions in the Connecticut Valley including Timothy who, in 1684, was asked to become minister to the Valley's most prestigious congregation, the First Church of Hartford. Woodbridge was the second avowed Presbyterian to fill the pulpit (John Haynes being the first) and brought tranquility to a congregation weary of thirty years of fighting between "Presbyterians" and "Congregationalists."[31]

The second author, Benjamin Colman, was considerably younger than Woodbridge. Son of a Boston shop-keeper, Benjamin graduated from Harvard in 1692 then went to England where he spent several years ministering to parishes in and around London. In 1698, certain Bostonians approached Colman about accepting the call to a new church to be organized on principles unacceptable to prevailing congregational notions. Colman finally accepted the offer, was ordained by the London Presbytery in 1699, and arrived in Boston late in that year. His first act as the new church's minister was to co-author its Manifesto.[32]

The third contributor was Simon Bradstreet, minister at Charlestown, Massachusetts, and a 1693 graduate of Harvard. He was the third in a long and distinguished line of Simon Bradstreets'. His grandfather was a governor of Massachusetts; his father a minister in Connecticut, principally in New London, where his name was from time to time linked with the Presbyterian faction in that colony. After graduation from Harvard, Simon Bradstreet spent six months at Hadley, Massachusetts, as a replacement for the deceased John Russell. But the young divine declined an offer to stay, feeling the church could not offer him enough in "grain and peas" for a proper living. He moved on to Medford, Massachusetts but declined their offer as well when he discovered that he was being considered for the pulpits of Boston's Old South Church and the church at Charlestown. He ultimately went to Charlestown.[33]

These, then were the men who wrote Gospel Order Revived. It has long been assumed that their sole purpose in doing so was to defend the Brattle Street church. That this was one of their goals can not be denied. Yet, it was not their main intention. Benjamin Colman could have easily performed such a task unaided. He would not have needed tha aid of two co-authors, particularly since one lived and worked so far from Boston. Obviously the trio had another purpose in mind, one necessitating the cooperation of men of similar views a hundred miles apart.

The purpose of Gospel Order Revived was made apparent in the "Introduction." Their intention, the authors wrote, was to defend a tradition--New England

Presbyterianism--against Increase Mather on one side and Stoddard on the other. They disagreed completely with Mather's interpretation of New England's ecclesiastical position as tenacious adherence to his own peculiar notions of moderate Congregationalism. They could not accept his view of New England "orthodoxy" and his characterization of Presbyterian "innovators" nor could they accept his definition of the true Presbyterian as one who adhered to the Heads of Agreement. Also, they sought to disassociate Presbyterianism from Stoddardeanism. They neither accepted nor were sympathetic to Stoddard's "Instituted Church" and they wanted New England and the world to know that they, not Stoddard, spoke for New England's Presbyterians. They agreed with Stoddard on many questions of polity--membership requirements, synodical authority, and particular church covenants--but the discipline they espoused was New Testament, not Old. They sought, like Mather, the essence of primitive Christianity and they could not accept Stoddard's emphasis on the Old Testament Jewish church or his argument for institutionalized salvation through "converting" sacraments.

The heart of their attack, however, was devoted to Mather. Stoddard embarassed them but his views were essentially Presbyterian and they obviously felt that to debate the Northampton divine would only jeopardize their own cause. Instead, they castigated the Boston divine for using a sound Presbyterian like Quick in a blatant attempt to degrade all native Presbyterians by linking them to the startling theories of a pseudo-Presbyterian like Stoddard. "Mr. Quick is here betrayed in a specious show of Reverence and friendship," they noted, "while his Name is used to Combat those very men and their Principles, which he most values and honours."[34] Were he there among them, they concluded, he would be decried as much as they.

What they were trying to tell Mather was that he had mistakenly used one Presbyterian to disprove all others, when in fact the others were in complete agreement. Mather's mistake, the author's argued, was in assuming their views were identical to Stoddard's. Nothing was farther from the truth. They accepted Quick's denunciation of Stoddard's conception of the Lord's Supper. Stoddard did not speak for all Presbyterians--Connecticut or otherwise--only for himself. "Had the Attestations,"[35] they concluded, "been only to recommend the following Treatise of the excellent Mr. Quick's to our perusal and Practice, no Minister in New England, that calls himself a Presbyterian, but would chearfully subscribe it; But we believe few would consider it in its Reflections on the Reverend Mr. Stoddard, or favour that worse Report! That under the Umbrage of the Name of Presbyterianism some would bring in Innovations, ruinous to our Churches, and contrary to the Doctrine and Spirit of Mr. Quick's Book."[36] No doubt the last line was received gloomily in Northampton.

The crux of the trio's argument against Mather, however, lay in an attack on his interpretation on New England's ecclesiastical history, particularly the ideal of congregational orthodoxy--spelled out in the Synods of "48" and "62"--which supposedly dominated its development. "It is a groundless Calumny which is suggested," they wrote, "that a latitude beyond what our Author (Mather) contends for, is but a betraying the liberties and priviledge; which our Lord Jesus Christ has given to his Church, or the Brethren of the Church."[37] Mather, they went on, argued that the founders of New England came to institute congregational discipline, that this was their sole intent and that, therefore, any deviators were obviously blaspheming the memory of their ancestors and rejecting the very essence of the mission of God's people in the wilderness. To that they replied that it was not their intention to dishonor their parents and they certainly did not admit doing so by upholding Presbyterianism. The true intent of the founders, they concluded, "has been somewhat differently conveyed unto us."[38] Their intent, they argued, "was to be freed from the imposition of Man in the Worship of God," or, as Samuel Willard had once phrased it, "to sequester themselves into a quiet corner of the World, where they might enjoy Christs' unmixt

Institutions, and leave them uncorrupted to Posterity."[39] They knew of no intention to establish and enshrine a particular discipline. "Some indeed," they continued, "would make the design of our first Planters to consist in some little Rites, Modes or Circumstances of Church Discipline and those such, as the Word of God no where requires. These are the men who dishonour their Country, and their Fathers Memory, by making their great design to lie in so small matters."[40]

But did that implied toleration mean that New England ought to have no ecclesiastical constitution? Yes, replied the trio, if to have one meant the ruthless extermination of opposing views as implied by both the Messrs. Stoddard and Mather. Such conformity, they believed, was never intended by the founders of the colony nor was it ever really a reality in New England. The founders had come to "enjoy Christ's unmixt Institutions" not a particular polity. After arrival they had begun to see the divisions among themselves on questions of church government, and it was from a vain attempt to solve these dilemmas that New England found herself in her present difficulties. "And it is notorious there has been no agreement in these points from the beginning," they noted ruefully, and yet there was Increase Mather arguing as if his own position was God's truth and dissenters were "not on the Lords side, [but were] enemies to the cause of Christ, and the Churches of

New England."[41] Such an attitude was the real source of New England's woes; the assumption by both Congregationalists and Presbyterians that only their peculiar views were God's views, that only they were true Christians and that all others were charlatans and ought to be dealt with accordingly. However, the argument continued, since the Congregationalists were traditionally in the majority, the authors placed most of the blame on the Mathers and others of their ilk. They were the ones who proclaimed the great mission of the inhabitants of New England as the perpetuation of a congregational polity while knowing the founders had intended no such thing. They were the ones who interpreted New England's ecclesiastical history as an unswerving loyalty to a particular polity while knowing full well that the country's heritage was a continuing dialogue between the proponents of several polities. They were the ones--Stoddard notwithstanding--who most often used a one-sided view of New England's purpose and history as a justification for the elimination of dissenters as though they, and they alone, were the only true Christians. What pretention!

In a sense the thoughts of Woodbridge, Colman and Bradstreet were much the same as those expressed by John Woodbridge in his letter to Richard Baxter thirty years before. How could New Englanders profess to the world loyalty and adherence to a particular discipline when in reality the country seethed with controversy and factionalism? To the Presbyterian trio that hypocrisy was the true source of strife. Instead of seeking agreement on fundamentals and attempting to find harmony through the recognition of common ground, Presbyterians and Congregationalists--spurred mainly by Congregationalist intolerance--sought a death struggle, little realizing the danger to the country inherent in such strife. Messrs. Woodbridge, Bradstreet and Colman called for harmony rather than warfare. They called for the recognition that in "fundamentals" the two sides were in agreement. They called for the establishments of an ecclesiastical constitution that would include the essentials of both polities; one based on tolerance rather than intolerance. New England's restoration and reformation, they argued, was to be found in a real unity based on tolerance and compromise rather than intolerance and suppression.[42]

Yet despite the authors' avowed dislike for partisanship and their affirmation that New England would thrive only under an ecclesiastical constitution encompassing Presbyterians and Congregationalists, the Gospel Order Revived was not a treatise designed to promote harmony. If there was agreement on "fundamentals" between Congregationalists and Presbyterians, Woodbridge, Colman and Bradstreet did not dwell on them. The only obvious area of agreement was that reformed polity ought to be patterned after the practice of the primitive Christian church. Yet even here the Presbyterians and Mather were not in complete agreement. The Presbyterians, leaning toward Stoddard's position, argued in favor of national covenants, citing God's covenant with Abraham as scriptural justification.[43]

Nothing in the Gospel Order Revived was novel in New England for the points of difference of Presbyterians with Congregationalists were well known. The Congregationalist argued that the spiritual authority of Christ passed to congregations of saints through particular church covenants. The Presbyterians denied that, arguing that Christ's authority was transferred to the elders through the Apostles. Thus the Congregationalists argued that spiritual authority was held by particular churches and that they became true churches only when members covenanted with one another and with God. The Presbyterians, on the other hand, argued that ruling power lay with the eldership, that the true church was composed of all Christians and that particular churches were only places where Christians came together to glorify God through the sacraments.

Not surprisingly, the authors of Gospel Order Revived, dealt in greatest detail with the three specific issues raised by Mather in his denunciation of the Brattle Street church in the Order of the Gospel. Those issues--the covenant, the power of the brethren, and admission requirements--were considered by Mather as crucial to New England's Congregational polity and he was spirited in their defense. Woodbridge, Colman and Bradstreet were just as adamant in their opposition. Commenting on the New England practice of requiring a "tryall" for persons before admission to communion--a trial designed to search the hearts of aspirants for signs of regeneration so that hypocrites might be kept out--the three quoted Samuel Willard's statement that "God has appointed the preaching of the Gospel, the Sacraments...for edification, and the promoting of Christian love among his people; but we read nothing of these imposed relations...nor is there any appearance of such a Custom in the primitive Church."[44] To the argument for a particular church covenant they replied that they rejected any covenant "enter'd into by some Persons of a Christian Society, exclusive of the rest, whereby they being in Covenant one with another, should thereby call themselves a Church of Christ, making the Ordinances of Christ, or any of them to depend on this Covenant, so that those who scruple it, or refuse to joyn in it, shall on that account, not enjoy them. And that those who are thus covenanted, or the major part of them, have power to make or unmake Officers, to admit or reject Church Members, to manage Discipline, to order the affairs of Christs House in his Name, as if they had warrant and communion from him so to do."[45]

In rejecting the notion of a particular church covenant the Presbyterians were denying, of course, the autonomy of the congregation. But they were doing much more for they were, like Stoddard, attacking the essential element of a congregational polity, the "power of the fraternity." That power assumed two forms in congregational theory and, according to Mather, in the practice of New England's churches as well. As in the primitive church, in the act of covenanting Christ delegated a portion of his spiritual authority to the church, thus giving them the power to manage their own affairs and, more important, to convey spiritual power to officers, especially the minister, through election. This meant then that church officers were without authority outside their own congregations. It meant that officers of churches, meeting in synods or councils, lacked intrinsic authority unless the meetings were approved by their churches. It also meant that clergymen were powerless to minister to other congregations since their "gifts," or spiritual authority, stemmed from their selection by particular churches and in other churches that authority was non-existent.

The Presbyterians argued that spiritual and ruling power was bestowed by Christ on the Apostles--the original elders--and not with the laity. Thus assemblies of elders, not covenanted congregations, were intended to make decisions in matters of doctrine and discipline and they needed no authorization from churches to make their decisions binding. Conversely, in the particular church ruling power also lay with the elders. "We can never believe," they wrote, "that our Lord Jesus Christ has left every private Brother an equal Vote with any of his Officers, in ruling or managing his Church."[46] But the three Presbyterians were not as strict in that belief as was Stoddard. Stoddard denied the membership any real voice in matters of doctrine or discipline and was dubbed the Protestant "Pope" as a result. Woodbridge, Colman, and Bradstreet, though denying any spiritual power inherent in the laity, gave them certain rights out of expediency and common sense. They gave them authority in such matters as selecting their officers, including the minister and allowed them a voice in admissions though asserting that the final decision lay with the minister. However, they reasserted that ultimate ruling power and spiritual authority lay with the eldership, transferred to them by other elders in the act of "laying on of hands." The congregations power, small as it was, came from the elders.[47]

The meaning of Gospel Order Revived was clear. It was more than a defense of the newly formed Brattle Street church, although it was that. It was more than a defense of Presbyterianism, although it was that too. It was an attempt to proclaim--in the shadow of Mather's assertion that Congregationalism was the great tradition of the New England churches--that New England had never really known ecclesiastical orthodoxy. Rather, its tradition was the enjoyment of "Christ's unmixt institutions." Its history--and its tragedy--was a continuing struggle between Congregationalists and Presbyterians. The writers were asserting that Presbyterianism was as much a part of New England's heritage as Congregationalism. Yet their purpose, they believed, was not to perpetuate the struggle, but to dissassociate legitimate Presbyterianism from its strange offspring in Northampton. They recognized that their own Presbyterianism and Stoddard's were much alike, so they tred lightly lest they destroy their own cause--and Stoddard's--in a vain attempt to maintain purity of doctrine. But, nonetheless, their differences with Stoddard were significant. Some of his views were, they felt, dangerous "innovations," and they could ill afford to let Mather succeed in his attempt to place all Presbyterians in Stoddard's camp. Woodbridge, Colman, and Bradstreet expressed that willingness, but for a price. It was obvious from their argument that, though they proclaimed a desire to compromise, they envisioned a sound ecclesiastical constitution as essentially Presbyterian. Here they followed Stoddard. The Northampton divine had listed many scriptural and practical objections to Congregationalism, but had emphasized the practical. New England Congregationalism, he argued, simply had not worked in practice. It had placed too much power in the hands of the brethren and that had brought disaster to the clergy and to the country. The three Presbyterians agreed. The new constitution would have to place determining and binding power in the hands of the ministry.

Thus, the Gospel Order Revived was a call to New England's clergy to end its bickering over church discipline and to bring about the long needed reformation of religion by adopting an ecclesiastical constitution encompassing both sides. It was a call for the colonials to reject the appeals of Mather and Stoddard for doctrinal strife; to reject their pronouncements that New England would founder if dissenting notions were allowed to survive in favor of toleration and conciliation. Others, however, had issued similar calls for unity. New England ecclesiastical leaders had, since Cotton and Hooker, argued that the New England Canaan would not endure lest her citizens were of a single mind. Certainly, neither Solomon Stoddard nor Increase Mather objected to that conclusion. The problem lay in the fact that, traditionally, neither Congregationalists nor Presbyterians had shown any real willingness to renounce their beliefs in the name of unity.

The Stoddard-Mather debate continued for the rest of the decade but subsequent arguments were largely restatements and elaborations of themes already stated.

Curiously, no one came to Stoddard's defense. The literature was all in opposition, except for John Wise's Vindication of the Churches which, like Gospel Order Revived, attacked both camps. No more was heard from Woodbridge, Colman or Bradstreet. Clearly they believed their objective achieved. They had sought to vindicate what they considered legitimate New England Presbyterianism in light of Stoddard's innovations and Mather's distortions of New England's ecclesiastical history. Having done that they withdrew and watched, perhaps in horror, as the two divines heaped scorn and abuse upon one another.

But while the debate, particularly in its later years, tended to focus on the apparent vendetta between the two Massachusetts clergymen, its real significance was not lost to clergy who merely observed from a distance for the participants expressed the feelings of the inarticulate majority. Certainly the opinions expressed by Mather, Stoddard, Wise, Woodbridge, Colman and Bradstreet revealed the awesome split in the ranks of the ministers and made it a matter of public record. And yet, despite the seemingly irreconcilable differences separating them, the disputants had shown remarkable agreement on some things; agreement sufficiently broad enough to serve as a basis for eventual accommodation if the clergy so desired. Certainly they were in agreement on the primacy of the minister's role in bringing about the country's decline, though they disagreed violently on which ministers of what persuasions were most responsible. They agreed also that ecclesiastical differences were responsible for the split, though they differed on how those differences could be eliminated. They agreed on the obvious loss of power and prestige they had suffered, though they disagreed on how that loss could be overcome. Finally, they agreed also that immediate collective action by the clergies of Connecticut and Massachusetts--a synod of elders--was imperative, though they were far apart on how the synod, or synods, would proceed, what authority it or they would have, and how decisions would be enforced. They agreed that the ministry had to end its squabbling but were less than unanimous on how that was to be accomplished. Stoddard envisioned a synod which would banish Congregationalism and create an ecclesiastical constitution embodying his views; one placing ecclesiastical authority in the hands of the clergy and imposed on the churches whether they consented or not. In this view he was alone. On the one hand, Woodbridge, Colman, and Bradstreet favored a church whose doctrine and polity more resembled Stoddard's than Mather's but, like Mather, they were interested in compromise, not warfare, and voluntary acceptance rather than coercion. On the other hand, Mather proclaimed great hostility to Presbyterianism and to Stoddard, yet he admired the English Plan of Union, and hinted that he might reach accord with the likes of the author's of Gospel Order Revived. And, since Mather, Colman, Bradstreet, and Woodbridge expressed the sentiments of most Connecticut and Massachusetts clergy, there seemed a strong likelihood of eventual public accommodation.

The clergy worked toward such a goal even while they argued. In eastern Massachusetts formal ministerial "associations" had existed since 1690[48] and, in 1705, Increase Mather led a group of Boston area ministers in an attempt to legalize their existence and to give them a modicum of power. Five ministerial associations circulated proposals for a Massachusetts synod which would recommend the establishment, by law, of area associations of ministers and laymen as well as an annual general council of all the churches of the country. The powers of the general council were ill-defined but the powers of the associations were quite explicit. They were to determine cases of discipline and solve church disputes and were to act as licensing bureaus for young ministers, examining them and certifying their qualifications. However, to the amazement of the clergy concerned, the proposals generated almost no enthusiasm among the churches contacted and little or none among members of the General Assembly and the matter died.[49]

Stoddard took no part in the abortive Proposals of

1705. While respected and perhaps feared in the Bay area he could count on no supporters for his view in Mather's bailiwick. Thus, he looked on, though he was no doubt saddened by the clergy's inability even to effect the calling of a synod. In lieu of a synod, he worked for the creation of a purely ministerial association for his county (Hampshire) which would possess much of the ecclesiastical power his Doctrine of Instituted Churches had envisioned. What he achieved must have been personally disappointing. Evidently few of his Valley colleagues shared his views for the Hampshire Association, when formed (1714), was a model of the kind of association envisioned by the authors of the Proposals of 1705, not Stoddard. Moreover, even its limited authority was not much liked by the area churches and in its first attempt to solve a church dispute its decisions were ignored by all concerned.[50]

Stoddard may have hoped for better things from Connecticut. If he did he was again disappointed for supporters of his peculiar position were scarce in the lower Valley region as well. However, support for a colony-wide synod was not lacking either among the clergy or members of the Connecticut Assembly. Sentiment was also strong for the formulation of an ecclesiastical constitution and there was general unanymity among clergy that their collective authority ought to be returned to them through legal sanction. Moreover, there were many ministers who would have preferred seeing that authority returned through the establishment of a Presbyterian constitution; many who shared Stoddard's contempt for congregational "anarchy." Certainly much of this was due to Stoddard's long service and activity in the Connecticut Valley. True, he could count few ministerial or lay converts to "Stoddardeanism" but, nonetheless, his tough language had stiffened the clerical backbone in the region. He had exposed the weakness of their position, had shown many of them how Congregational theory was adding to their woes by allowing power to become deeply entrenched among unenlightened laymen, and convinced them that their own petty disputes were primarily responsible for the country's woe and for God's anger toward his people, and had convinced many that, if the land was to be saved, Congregationalism had to at least be modified and some power placed in the hands of the clergy. All this he had accomplished among the Connecticut clergy and among certain political leaders as well, even if many of his colleagues did see his dictatorial leanings and his converting ordinances as "dangerous tendencies."

But, though Stoddard's influence could be seen at work among Connecticut's ministers, the real impetus for an ecclesiastical constitution came from within the colony and centered around the little group of clergy instrumental in the creation of Yale College. That group, a mixture of Presbyterians and moderate Congregationalists, meeting to discuss the new college in 1703, sent out a letter to the churches asking them to "peruse the assemblies (Westminster) Confession of Faith, as also that made by the Synod held at Boston, May 12, 1680, and manifest in convenient season the concurrence with us in addressing our Religious government...that they would please to recommend to our people and their posterity the following Confession of Faith, viz., that agreed upon by the Reverend Assembly at Westminster, as it is comprised in and Represented by the Confession made by the Synod in Boston, May 12, 1680."[51]

The reaction was generally favorable though not overwhelming. Additional impetus for such a meeting was provided by the Massachusetts proposals of 1705 and was not dampened by their failure. In addition, the sanction of the Connecticut Assembly was assured in 1707 when Gurdon Saltonstall, former minister of the New London church, leading Presbyterian, supporter of Stoddard, and synod advocate became the colony's new governor. In May the Assembly issued a call to the churches for the ministers to meet in each "countie town." "This Assembly," the call stated, "from their own observation and from the complaint of many others, being made sensible of the defects of the discipline of the churches of this government, arising from the want of a more explicite asserting the rule giving for that end in the holy scriptures, from which would arise a firm establishment amongst ourselves, a good and regular issue in cases subject to ecclesiastical discipline, glory to Christ our head, and edification to his members, hath seen fit to ordain and require...that the ministers of the churches...meet together at their respective countie towns."[52] They were to meet together with their lay brethren and draw up a platform of church discipline "conformable to the word of God." They were then to select two representatives to meet with all of the other county representatives at Saybrook to compare their plans and draw up a single proposal for presentation at the General Assembly's October meeting.[53]

The representatives of the churches met in the summer of 1708 and sought to find the agreement on "fundamentals" suggested by the authors of Gospel Order Revived. From the beginning, however, the composition of the group made it evident that the platform would be more Congregational than Presbyterian. Presbyterians dominated the Hartford County delegation (led by Timothy Woodbridge) and the Fairfield County group. All other counties presented platforms endorsing a moderate Congregationalism similar to that embodied in the Massachusetts Proposals of 1705; that is, one recognizing the necessity of some governing body above individual churches but resting the power of that body in the voluntary consent of the brethren. From all available evidence the meetings included few anti-synod Congregationalists or supporters of Stoddard's "Instituted Church."[54]

The work of the representatives went smoothly and in a remarkable spirit of compromise. First, the group turned to consideration of a united confession of faith. The 1703 letter from the ministers had endorsed the Westminster confession but the majority of those men had been Presbyterians arguing for a confession composed by a synod of predominantly Presbyterian divines. The majority of the representatives at Saybrook, however, preferred the Savoy Confession of 1658, which was the creation of a group of English Congregational divines. After some debate the Presbyterians finally gave in.

The Synod also endorsed the Heads of Agreement of 1691; the joint declaration of the London Congregationalists and Presbyterians. True to the spirit of the meeting the doctrine contained in the Heads of Agreement was sufficiently vague and all-encompassing to forge common ground between the competing disciplines without really resolving any of the traditional points of dispute between them. For example, there was disagreement between Presbyterians and Congregationalists as to the nature of Christ's visible church. The Heads merely noted the distinction between Protestant and Roman Catholic doctrine:

> We acknowledge our Lord Jesus Christ to have one Catholick Church, or Kingdom, comprehending all that are united to Him, whether in Heaven or Earth. And do conceive the whole multitude of visible Believers, and their Infant-Seed...to belong to Christ's Spiritual Kingdom in this world; But for the notion of a Catholick Visible Church here, as it signifies its having been collected into any formed Society, under a Visible common Head on Earth, whether one Person singly, or Many collectively, We, with the rest of Protestants, unanimously disclaim it.[55]

The statement on admission requirements reflected the same desire for unity. For generations the churches of Connecticut had argued over the correct method for admitting new members. The definition of the "visible saint" as contained in the Heads left sufficient latitude for the narrowest or broadest admission policy:

> That none shall be admitted as Members, in order to Communion in all the special Ordinances of the Gospel, but such persons as are knowing and sound in the fundamental Doctrine of the Christian Religion, without Scandal in their Lives; and to a Judgment regulated by the Word of God, are persons of visible Holiness and Honesty; credibly professing cordial subjection to Jesus Christ.[56]

Only on the question of church government for Connecticut was their a semblance of real partisanship, yet there too the result was a quiet compromise. The representatives perused the drafts presented by the various counties. Presbyterians tended to favor the plan presented by Timothy Woodbridge on behalf of Hartford County while Congregationalists drifted toward the plan presented by Nicholas Noyes for New Haven County. The majority favored the New Haven plan, "but some Clauses were put into it, in Conformity to Mr. Woodbridge of Hartford and some others, who were inclined to the Presbyterian Side."[57]

The plan of church government adopted was remarkably similar to that of the "Proposals" of 1705. A general council or synod of all the churches was to meet yearly to discuss common problems and to make recommendations. No real powers were assigned to that body, however. The essence of the plan was the creation of county "associations" of ministers which were to have the authority to determine cases of discipline and the qualifications of would-be ministers, and were to be given the power to render binding decisions in church disputes.[58]

Thus the completed platform was presented to the Connecticut Assembly in October, having been unanimously agreed to by all the elders and messengers of the assembled churches. The Assembly acted quickly, declaring its "great approbation of such a happy agreement," and ordaining "that all the churches within this government that are or shall be thus united in doctrine, worship, and discipline, be, and for the future shall be... established by law."[59]

The Saybrook Platform was the symbol of unity so long sought by the Valley clergy yet it was a different kind of unity than that envisioned by Thomas Hooker or by Increase Mather. Their unity was the unity of conformity to a particular discipline--Congregationalism. The doctrine contained in the Saybrook Platform was general in nature, glossing over many of the struggles which had traditionally divided the ministers. The form of church government proclaimed was a compromise; a half-way house between Congregationalists and Presbyterians satisfactory to none but acceptable to all. Yet, even that compromise was not to be forced on unsympathetic churches. The Assembly, while announcing its pleasure at the result of the synod's activities and while establishing by law the essentials of its work, indicated to dissenting churches that they could exercise "worship and discipline in their own way, according to their consciences."[60]

In a real sense the Saybrook Platform sought to resolve the paradox between the publicly proclaimed ideals of the ministry and churches and the reality of congregational life--the "hypocrasy" noted by John Woodbridge in 1671 of a land which claimed congregational orthodoxy yet where churches appeared torn by the claims of rival polities. Saybrook sought to enshrine no particular discipline. The ministers felt they had learned in the sorry struggles of the preceding century that, in the Connecticut Valley, conformity to a particular discipline could not be had without the destruction of church and society. To them, the lessons of Hartford and Wethersfield--of Samuel Stone and John Russell--were clear. Unity would come only through the acceptance of diversity. At first, they had sought this unity through a renewed emphasis on piety. The "jeremiad," so common in the last decades of the 17th century, had placed the blame for the Valley's condition on the people. They had lost the essence of religion. Their hearts had been cold; their attitudes worldly. They had performed religious duties as a meaningless ritual while their hearts had been devoid of love for Christ. Such an appeal had momentarily united the ministry and had ignored differences of polity in the face of a more fundamental problem. They had hoped the effect among the people would be the same.

But the appeal had failed. The Doctrine of Instituted Churches proclaimed it; Gospel Order Revived upheld it. Stoddard, from his position in Northampton, had placed the blame for the decay of religion on the ministry, and on Congregationalism. He also had argued, however, that the ministry possessed the power for the land's redemption--reform through an ecclesiastical constitution. Increase Mather had accepted Stoddard's diagnosis though he had blamed Presbyterianism and had urged a return to the Congregationalism of the Cambridge Platform.

Woodbridge, Colman and Bradstreet had sounded a different note, however. The ministers were to blame but not because of adherence to a single discipline.

Rather, they had argued, the Stoddard-Mather debate was symptomatic of the source of New England's woes. From the beginning ministers and brethren had argued differences in polity and accomplished nothing but dissention. New England, they argued, would know no peace until such arguments were resolved under the umbrella of an ecclesiastical constitution ignoring ecclesiastical differences and emphasizing instead, agreement on "fundamentals." The Saybrook Platform was such a document. The thinking of the majority of Connecticut's ministers echoed the Presbyterian trio. Their view was a reflection of Connecticut's ecclesiastical history. Their solution conformed to it. Saybrook rejected Mather's view of 17th century New England--and Stoddard's as well.

More important, however, Saybrook sought to resolve Connecticut's crisis of authority by giving the sanction of law to ministerial power. It was in this sense that Woodbridge, Stoddard, and the other Valley Presbyterians won a common victory for the associations were to be ministerial associations and the powers of those groups were to be ministerial powers. The essence of Presbyterian polity was the authority of the elders, and Saybrook, in a real sense, recognized that authority.

Yet the power invested in the elders by the Saybrook Platform while essentially Presbyterian, also conformed to the experience of the ministers through seven decades of tending flocks in a wilderness. Saybrook was not so much an attempt to create authority as it was to restore it. The Presbyterian argument only tended to buttress what most ministers had learned from working with power-hungry laymen. The church disputes of the seventeenth century had seriously weakened the ministers position in their churches. Their advice; their commands--and those of the General Assembly--went unheeded. They were used by church factions to further selfish aims. They were vilified if their wisdom did not prove congenial to the thoughts of their charges. Numerous ministers shared the fate of Samuel Stone and were harried from their pulpits.

The "jeremiad" psychology had sought to change that. The ministers had hoped to regain their former eminence through persuasion; by convincing their flocks of the need for reformation. Stoddard had announced the failure of that attempt as well. His solution was a discipline more authoritarian in outlook than anything dreamed of by even the most ardent Valley Presbyterian. Stoddard equated congregational power with anarchy, argued that the experience of New England supported his position, and urged an ecclesiastical system in which all power was placed in the hands of the elders.

Stoddard found little support for his position, but that did not mean that his analysis of the situation was rejected. Mather saw some wisdom in it while the authors of Gospel Order Revived accepted it wholeheartedly. Most ministers felt the need for some kind of government above the congregational level. The synod of 1662 had endorsed it, the Connecticut synod of 1667 had done the same, as had the Massachusetts synod of 1671. In the 1690's the ministers of Massachusetts and Connecticut went beyond the concept of the general synod and organized area or county associations. But they had proven little more than advisory groups or debating societies; meetings where ministers could air grievances, discuss common problems and seek solutions. But no solution was binding. In 1695 several associations in the Bay area had sought to change that situation through their "Proposals" but had failed. In Connecticut the opposite had been true. Thanks to a strong Presbyterian faction, a Presbyterian governor, a sympathetic Assembly, the memory of battles of earlier years and, perhaps, the influence of Solomon Stoddard, the informal associations became "established by law" in the Saybrook Platform.[61]

However, neither the creation of ecclesiastical unity nor the return of ministerial authority were the fruits of Saybrook. Instead of unity and tranquility the Platform only brought more strife. Created by the representatives of all the churches; ratified by the representatives of all churches, legalized by the civil representatives of members of those churches, the

Platform found a less than eager reception when ministers and lay representatives presented it to their churches for consideration. In Fairfield County, a center of Presbyterian sentiment, the ministers ignored the legalized structure of the associations as contained in the Platform and formed their own Presbyterian synod. Meeting on March 16 and 17, 1708/9, the churches of that county amended the Platform and gave the Fairfield Association powers reminiscent of a church court.[62] Most churches, however, reacted in an opposite fashion and eagerly utilized the right of dissent from the Platform given them by the Assembly. The opposition focused on the proposed associations. Many churches viewed those proposals as thoroughly Presbyterian and designed to destroy the autonomy of the individual congregation. Some, such as the church of East Windsor, rejected the Platform in its entirety while many others rejected only those sections on church government, thus rendering the whole Platform ineffective. Others gave it a kind of conditional approval. They ratified its provisions while reaffirming their congregational autonomy and instructing their ministers that they could do nothing as members of their associations that did not have the prior approval of the churches.[63] Still other churches neutralized the power of the association through amendment. The churches of New Haven County, for example, (the source of the essentials of the platform) stripped their association of most of its power.

The reaction in Norwich, Connecticut was typical of the Platform's reception in many churches. John Woodward was the minister of the Norwich church. He was a moderate Congregationalist--certainly not a Presbyterian--yet when his church learned the nature of the Platform and especially its proposals for the formation of ministerial associations a bitter contest developed. Many of the members supported Woodward, but more did not, calling the Platform "Presbyterian" and wanting nothing to do with it. Woodward fought for ratification but his side was eventually defeated and he was forced to resign. The Platform was defeated.

That, however, did not end the dispute. Woodward's successor, Benjamin Lord, began preaching in 1716. The church, perhaps fearing that Lord might make a new attempt at ratification of the Platform, resolved to continue "to practice that Form of Church Government, called Congregational, as formerly practised by the Generality of the Churches in New England, and according to the Agreement of the Synod, at Cambridge 1648." Lord was forced, as a condition of settlement, to accept the church's dissent from Saybrook.

Lord, however, either changed his mind or privately disagreed with the church's decision for, in 1724, he asked his charges for permission to attend the meetings of the New London County Association. He assured them that he would inform the members of the association that his attendance implied neither his own consent to the Saybrook Platform nor that of his church. His reason for attending was simply that he had "often thought that it was a damage...to live as one Alone upon the Earth." His church agreed and there the matter ended.[64]

The lay reaction to the Saybrook Platform was not anticipated by its architects. It was not tantamount to total rejection yet it was sizeable enough to indicate to the ministers that a deep cleavage still existed between ministers and people. The ministers had expended enormous amounts of time and energy creating a vehicle which satisfied few clergymen yet which seemed to offer the best hope for peace. However, after the laymen finished with it, the Saybrook Platform bore little resemblance to its original form and intent. To be sure, as in Fairfield County, some of the changes were for Presbyterianism, but most of the dissidents were Congregationalists who should have found the tenents of the Platform quite compatible with their views since the majority at Saybrook had upheld moderate Congregationalism. But the Congregationalism of the brethren was not moderate, it was rigid. The laity viewed any infringement upon their power as creeping Presbyterianism. Unfortunately, no cleric had upheld that position at Saybrook. No one had fought for it in the General Assembly either. Yet it was there and was warmly embraced by the laity. Such was the nature of the ecclesiastical cleavage in Connecticut. The clergy supported moderate Congregationalism or Presbyterianism; the laity upheld the autonomy of individual congregations and the power of the fraternity. Ruling power was still firmly in the hands of the people and unity was still an illusion.

VI

"The Power of the Fraternity": The Valley Churches, 1675-1708

Lay opposition to the Saybrook Platform sounded the death knell for many of traditional goals of Connecticut clergymen. For half a century they had sought the means to restore the authority and prestige lost during the long and arduous church struggles. They had sought to stem what they saw as the people's lust for power and to destroy the selfish pride underlying that lust. They had sought the means to restore, at least in part, the old values and social relationships prevalent before 1650 and considered essential to the fulfillment of God's plan for his people in the New England Wilderness: personal piety, sublimation of the self to the good of the whole, and respect for and subjection to properly constituted authority. The loss of such values had, for the clergy, marked the beginning of New England's "decay."

The reaction to Saybrook was proof positive of how unrealistic were the clergy's assumptions and conclusions about the men and women in their churches. The ministry had assumed that it still possessed enough collective authority and prestige that what it thought or did would receive the endorsement of the laity. The ministers were quickly proven wrong. Also, they had assumed that the people would relinquish their power voluntarily when confronted by the combined might of General Assembly and ministerial synod. That too proved erroneous. Clearly, over five decades the gulf between minister and people in Connecticut had widened, not lessened. While the ministers sought the internal unity necessary to support and sustain an attempt to regain lost authority and reinstitute lost values, the brethren also were busy building unity in order to protect the authority and power won at the expense of the clergy. The experience of the Norwich church was proof both of that unity of purpose and of the gulf existing between minister and people. The brethren of that church acted quickly and efficiently against the Saybrook Platform. Its "Presbyterianism" was denounced and the sections on church government soundly defeated. To complete the rout the minister was ousted from his pulpit and his successor forced to make, as the condition of his settlement, a pledge that he would not seek to alter the church's stand on the Platform. What further proof was needed to show the true center of ecclesiastical power in Connecticut?

Moreover, not only did the good people of Norwich display unity of purpose in protecting their power, they also provided an inkling as to source of that unity. In rejecting their minister and the Presbyterianism he represented they did so not in the name of the First Church of Norwich but in the name of the

"Congregational Way" of the Cambridge Platform. Obviously the church viewed its act not as the promotion of a selfish parochial concern but as an act designed to protect the "Congregational Way" of the New England churches against Presbyterian innovation. The church's stand was thus given cosmic significance. The unbridled "power of the fraternity" was, as the church's action implied, no device fashioned by the brethren of the churches of Connecticut to suit their own selfish designs but was God's intended way for his New England churches and was spelled out in that synod of the founding fathers, the Cambridge Platform. The people of Norwich were merely protecting New England's heritage against outside encroachment.

The Connecticut clergy ought to have had some inkling of what was to come in the indifference of the people to the most outstanding ecclesiastical happening of the first decade of the eighteenth century, the Stoddard-Mather debate. The pamphlet war between those eminent divines was a unique event in the annals of New England's brief ecclesiastical history. The questions debated were of profound importance in that the nature of New England's mission in the wilderness was contested, the religious state of the people analyzed at length, and competing polities were, for the first time, given a thorough public airing. Numerous other clergy also participated via the pen and the spoken word but aside from Timothy Woodbridge of Hartford, no Valley clergy participated in the controversy, though the shadows of the competing arguments fell on the proceedings at Saybrook.[1]

Fifty years earlier such a debate would have rent the Valley churches like a great earthquake. Yet the Stoddard-Mather confrontation produced few seismic shocks among the laity. Extant church records and other relevant documents provide little more than a hint that the nature of New England's ecclesiastical institutions were being questioned. In 1700, William Brattle of Cambridge, Massachusetts, noted that his church was in an uproar over the publication of Mather's Order of the Gospel and Stoddard's Doctrine of Instituted Churches.[2] Similiar disturbances must have occurred in the Connecticut Valley when the esteemed minister of up-river Northampton dared challenge the famous Increase Mather. But if such was the case there were no lasting effects for the records are absolutely silent. No disputes were generated by the controversy. No alterations were made in church discipline or government to conform to one of the positions. No dissident groups withdrew to form new churches. The divines argued, but the congregations remained silent.

Even in the environs of Northampton where sentiment for Stoddard should have been strongest relative tranquility prevailed. Increase Mather referred to Stoddard's influence as the "Presbyterianism running down the Connecticut River," but if such were true it somehow avoided the laity. No evidence exists to lend credence to the notion that Stoddard spoke from a position of strength, surrounded by churches and ministers loyal to his cause. On the contrary, he lived and worked in an area which maintained a certain hostility toward his views. His own congregation was a prime example. Despite his pseudo-Presbyterianism, his authoritarianism, his peculiar notion of the sacraments, his hatred for anything remotely "congregational," his reforms were quietly--and consistently--resisted by his people. He may have appeared a demon to Increase Mather, ready to destroy New England's ecclesiastical system at a stroke and to replace it with rule by synod and open communion, but in Northampton he remained the pastor of the First Congregational Church. Ruling power was, at best, divided evenly between pastor and people, although, as Edward Taylor's notebook indicated, it was weighted toward the laity. Stoddard's people remained unreformed by the "Pope" for, throughout his pastorate, ultimate authority never really left the hands of the members, even though he constantly sought approval for his system. Only in 1714 did the Northampton church take a significant step toward Presbyterianism when it approved the creation of the Hampshire Association. Yet even that was far short of what Stoddard desired for its power was limited to the arbitration of church disputes or the airing of knotty cases of discipline, yet it lacked binding power. Stoddard wanted more than a debating society rendering "advice" and admonishments. He wrote that when churches were errant, when grievances needed redress, somebody was needed to provide direction and satisfaction. "Advice is insufficient," he argued, "neither is withdrawing communion from such churches as do not take advice...because churches may neglect to hear advice."[3] Yet the Hampshire Association's charter lacked enforcement provisions to insure that advice would be heeded and provided no evidence that member churches were surrendering their sovereignty.

Stoddard failed to convince his own church of the wisdom of his polity. His church never accepted rule by elder nor did it endorse the heart of his system, the converting ordinances. The same was true of the other Hampshire churches. Half of them refused to join or even to consider the Hampshire Association. Six ministers drew up the proposal for its creation: Stoddard, John Williams of Deerfield, William Williams of Hatfield, Isaac Chauncey of Hadley, Daniel Brewer of Springfield's First Church, and Nathaniel Collins of Enfield. The wording of the proposal indicated that all of those men must have favored Presbyterianism, though not necessarily Stoddardeanism. The rationale for the existence of the Association was Presbyterian, particularly the concluding sentence which read "we judge it our duty, to be subject to a Council of the County, until there be some Superiour Council set up in the Province unto which we may appeal." Yet no evidence exists linking any of them with Stoddard's instituted church.[4]

The same was true for the churches those men represented. Extant records suggest that none approached the Stoddardean ideal nor were they particularly sympathetic to his views. The proposal for the formation of the Hampshire Association upheld the validity of a covenanted national church, suggested that individual churches ought to bow to higher ecclesiastical authority, yet contained no provision giving the association the kind of power to make those assertions reality. Even so, in at least one of the six churches a reaction was immediate. Nathaniel Collins of Enfield was faced with the loss of his pastorate. His flock refused to allow him to serve communion, complained bitterly of the quality of his preaching and in many other ways indicated their total dissatisfaction with him. The reasons for their feelings were varied but not the least was his attempt to involve them in the Hampshire Association.

The Enfield dispute was the first test of the strength of Stoddard's "ecclesiastical council." In 1714 a body of representatives from neighboring churches met but failed to find a solution. The next year the matter went to the association where it was studied and a scathing letter sent to the church. "We do not understand," the letter read, "that Mr. Collins has given any occasion of grievance. Several persons belonging to other places, who have occasionally heard him abroad and at home have given an Account that his preaching hath been profitable and worthy to be accepted and some of your (selves) that remain unfaithful have given testimony that his preaching has mended."[5] The church had asked for a council the preceeding year, the letter continued, but had ignored its advice. Now, it sought another council but, obviously, just to promote its own position. Clearly, the association was angered by the church's attempt to seek an outside source to buttress its own feelings. Clearly, also, they were not to find it.[6]

Three years later the dispute was still going on. The association had failed to find a solution and in a rather bitter letter to the church, Stoddard, John Williams and William Williams indicated that the only alternative was for Collins to go elsewhere, an obvious admission that the church had won and the association had lost in its initial attempt to assert "Superiour power over particular Congregations."[7] The letter was as follows:

> Brethren
>
> In answer to your letter of July 29th, we judge that the church of Endfield have had no cause of such dissatisfaction these many years, But have cause to reflect upon themselves, having manifested an unpeaceable and disorderly Spirit and layed God much temptation before Mr. Collins;...the discord is grown to so great a height, and rejects all remedies, so that it proves an overbearing discouragment and impediment to Mr. Collins in his work, and a great hindrance to the peoples edification and edification of their children, we judge it not unwarrantable to Mr. Collins to lay down his work in that place, hoping that God will make provision for him that he may be more servicable in another place."[8]
>
> Sol: Stoddard
> John Williams
> Wm. Williams

Collins left Enfield soon after.

The fate of Nathaniel Collins of Enfield, of Benjamin Lord of Norwich, the failure of Solomon Stoddard's "reforms," the inability of the Stoddard-Mather clash to produce an appropriate response in the churches, the reaction to the Saybrook platform in Connecticut and the lack of interest in Massachusetts for the Bay ministers "proposals" of 1705 for the creation of their own Saybrook Platform amply illustrated the gulf which existed between ministers and churches by the first decade of the eighteenth century. In the Connecticut Valley the situation had worsened since 1670. The authority of the minister was little respected, except when the views conformed to those of the majority of his people. A partial explanation for that deteriorating situation was to be found in the inescapable fact that, between 1670 and 1708, ministerial adherence to rigid Congregationalism largely disappeared. The clergy's belief that only it could bring reformation, that it must assume the leadership in the restoration of an errant people to old glory made fertile ground for moderate--that is, synodically oriented--Congregationalism, and Presbyterianism and, ultimately, for the rigid authoritarianism of a Solomon Stoddard. No one spoke for absolute congregational autonomy at Saybrook. Increase Mather was the darling of the Congregationalists yet his brand would have been anathema to a John Davenport. Davenport, in days gone by, had spoken for the rigid Congregationalists. He called for total congregational autonomy, total control by the membership, strict requirements for admission, limited baptism, rigid discipline administered by the church as a whole, and viewed any deviation--such as the Half-Way Covenant--as Presbyterianism.

There were no Davenports at Saybrook and that was to be the source of much misery for the clergy for there were many Davenports among the brethren. In the disputes of the 1650's, 60's and 70's the churches had become aware of their own power and had begun to use it. Even those in the churches who seemed inclined toward

"Presbyterianism" did not seek synods or classes of ministers to attain their goals but they relied on the sheer weight of numbers to overwhelm opponents. For the first time the members of the churches began to enunciate their own goals and to pursue them actively, regardless of the views of the traditional symbols of authority: clergy and magistrates. The saga of John Warham and the Windsor church bore eloquent testimony to that fact.

The great disputes of the mid-century represented a watershed in the ecclesiastical--and the social--history of the Connecticut Valley for it was a period when leadership and authority in the churches passed from the ministry to the brethren. All subsequent ecclesiastical events down to the Saybrook Platform were colored by that fact. For the churches the years from 1675 to 1708 were highlighted by a growing awareness of their own power and by the attempt to rationalize it. They found their rationalization in the fundamental doctrine of Congregationalism; the power of the fraternity.

The Norwich church, for example, lacked a tradition of adherence to anything but Congregationalism yet the response of the church to the Saybrook Platform was fairly typical of the way most churches reacted. In rejecting the platform the Norwich church asserted its desire to practice "that Form of Church Government, called Congregational" as specified in the Cambridge

Platform.[9] However, in justifying its opposition to Saybrook, the Norwich church referred only to the essence of the Cambridge Platform the autonomy of the individual congregation and the ultimate authority of that congregation in ecclesiastical affairs. No reference was made to other equally significant sections of the Cambridge Platform. Moreover, the church objected only to that section of the Saybrook Platform creating ministerial associations. All other sections were found agreeable. It showed no awareness, for example, that the basic thrust of the "Heads of Agreement," endorsed by Saybrook, was counter to the thrust of the Cambridge Platform which sought not to accommodate Presbyterianism, but to counter it. The Norwich church was interested only in protecting its own ecclesiastical authority and it obviously adhered to the Cambridge Platform only insofar as that platform affirmed the theory of congregational power.

That tenacious adherence to the spirit of the Cambridge Platform was a relatively new development in Connecticut ecclesiastical history. Not even in the disputes of the mid-seventeenth century were many references made to it. Few protagonists had attempted to use it as a source of authority or as a symbol of the power of the brethren. Yet, by 1708, it had become very important to many churches. Records were sprinkled with references to it and with affirmations that this or that congregation adhered to its form of government, "called Congregational."[10] However, like Norwich, churches claiming adherence to it seemed ignorant of many of its statements on doctrine and discipline. Apparently no attempt was made to systematically compare the practices of particular churches to the tenets of the Platform to see if they conformed. The brethren seemed interested in the Cambridge Platform for only one reason: to justify their own authority.

Solomon Stoddard, who knew the temper of the laity as well as any clergyman in the Connecticut Valley, published, in 1718, a savage attack on Congregational power and the Cambridge Platform entitled An Examination of the Power of the Fraternity.[11] The treatise was aimed at no particular person or persons. It was certainly not directed at Increase Mather since their controversy had ended some years before and the position Stoddard attacked was not one Mather endorsed. Rather, the pamphlet was addressed to the laity of the Connecticut Valley in general and perhaps, to those of Northampton in particular, especially those who had, for so many years, frustrated his attempts to reform the polity of the Northampton church.

In The Power of the Fraternity Stoddard reversed the earlier stand of The Doctrine of Instituted Churches by placing the entire blame for the unhappy state of religion in New England on Congregationalism as espoused not by the clergy but by its zealous guardians in the churches. The brethren, he wrote, were so jealous of their own rights that they refused to accept the leadership or guidance of the "Elders" even when it was pointed out to them that religion was declining and that they, in the name of the "power of the fraternity," were frustrating all attempts at reform. Implicit in his argument, of course, was the theory upheld by the Valley ministry for decades that they--and their civil counterparts--were the only persons capable of reviving religion in the country, and that the churches, by resisting ministerial leadership at the colonial level and at the local level, were frustrating those attempts.

Stoddard, whose analysis now sounded like that of the Synod of 1676, placed the blame for that situation on the laity's stubborn and blind adherence to the Cambridge Platform. "The Mistakes of one Generation," he stated in an oft-quoted passage, "many times become the calamity of succeeding generations. The present generation are not only unhappy by reason of the darkness of their own minds, but the errors of those who have gone before them have been a foundation to a great deal of Misery." Stoddard sought to destroy the crutch of the churches by arguing that the Cambridge Platform was contrary to the "experience" of the Churches, that is was constructed "before they had much time to weigh those things...and some of their posterity are mightily devoted to it, as if the Platform were the Pattern in the Mount."[12] Stoddard's conclusion, and it was one which the Valley ministry had endorsed at Saybrook, was that a century of ecclesiastical history had proven that the "community" was not fit to judge and rule in the church. They were not persons of understanding or wisdom and most had not "read or studied." "If the Multitude were to be judges in Civil causes," he thundered, "things would quickly be turned upside down."[13]

In a way Stoddard seemed consistent with his older position for he had never shown love for congregational polity and had always preferred Presbyterian rule by elder. But, whereas in 1700 his Doctrine of Instituted Churches had found little of value in New England's ecclesiastical history except Presbyterianism and certainly no "truth" in the Cambridge Platform, he now argued from a different basis. It was not that all the doctrine contained in the Platform was incorrect, only the fundamental supposition that determining power lay in the hands of the "fraternity." Moreover, Stoddard's arguments against the Platform were both theoretical and practical, indicating his readers were laymen, not clergy. He wrote as though he were lecturing to his parishioners on the virtue of rule by elder and they were answering with specific objections. For example, after a brief attempt to show that the Platform's affirmation that the brethren had full power of judgment in matter of admission and censure was unscriptural, Stoddard devoted himself to specific instances, as though anticipating the arguments of his parishioners. He spoke of those who were willing to let elders be "moderators" of meetings and no more. He spoke of those who feared the possibility of "corrupt" elders, replying that if this were so the power of the brethren would be a poor defense for corrupt rulers were always elected by a corrupt people.[14] He spoke also of those who feared rule by eldership because it tended to "exalt the minister or debase the Brethren," he replied, "than the confining of Preaching to the Minister."[15]

Stoddard spoke from the position of his own traditional authoritarianism, a position he had espoused for a half-century. Yet there was a distinctly new twist to his arguments. In the Doctrine of the Instituted Churches he had spoken as a reformer--as one of the products of a century and a half of debate over Reformed polity. He had simply stated the essence of his position and given its scriptural and historical basis. It was directed to any who cared to notice, but to his clerical colleagues in particular. But in The Power of the Fraternity he spoke to the churches. True, his particular view of rule by eldership was anathema to many of his colleagues but his fundamental conception was not.

He now wrote as a reformer who for five decades had sought to revitalize religion in New England as only he--God's spokesman--could do. He found himself consistently frustrated by his parishioners in their jealous protection of their rights and prerogatives and in their blind adherence to the "power of the fraternity." He wrote for laymen who refused to admit that anyone or any power knew better than they what was or what was not in their interest; who cloaked their actions in the sanctity of the Cambridge Platform. Stoddard attacked Congregationalism but it was not the Congregationalism of his ministerial opponents. Rather, he attacked the peculiarly rigid form of Congregationalism which had developed among the laity of his Connecticut Valley; a form which seemed to subscribe to only one tenet, the power of the fraternity. In his attack Stoddard must have spoken not only for himself but for a whole generation of toilers in the vineyard.

The decline of Presbyterian and moderate Congregational (synodical) notions among the laity was, perhaps, the most significant aspect of the period from 1675-1708.[16] Nowhere was there a better example of that decline than among the brethren of Wethersfield. The First Church of Wethersfield was one of the centers of ecclesiastical strife in the middle of the seventeenth century. It was one of the few Connecticut churches to actually experiment with rule by elder; establishing a parish system sometime during the ministry of Gershom Bulkeley (1667-77).[17] Bulkeley left the church in 1677 because of poor health and began to practice medicine.[18] He was replaced for two years by Joseph Rowlandson who in turn, in 1679, gave way to John Woodbridge, the Presbyterian who had previously served the people of Killingworth and had established a Presbyterian church there. Woodbridge served until 1693 when he was replaced by Stephen Mix who remained until his death in 1738. Mix, a graduate of Harvard in 1690, was not one of the colony's more illustrious divines. Yet, though little was or is known of him certain evidence suggests that he was one of Solomon Stoddard's few disciples. First, he married one of Stoddard's daughters, a fact which, in itself, indicates no allegiance to the father-in-law. Yet, in his will Mix requested that each of his daughters be furnished with copies of all of the works of Stoddard, an act suggesting more than the simple respect of a son-in-law, particularly since Stoddard had died a decade before Mix.[19]

But while the minister of Wethersfield moved from Presbyterianism to Stoddardeanism, the members of the church moved toward an increasingly rigid Congregationalism. The records of Stephen Mix's ministry are scant but do indicate that the church was not Presbyterian. His baptismal records suggest that baptism was not available to all professing Christians.[20] In

1709, he began to record persons owning the "covenant," suggesting that the church had a binding covenant and that, perhaps, around 1709, had adopted the Half-Way Covenant--strange practices for a church once ruled and disciplined by elders. But the most illuminating event of Mix's tenure was recorded on January 2, 1703. The entry pertained to a case of discipline involving one Benjamin Church and his son, Benjamin, Jr. The younger Church was a member of Timothy Woodbridge's Hartford church. He returned to Wethersfield and asked for admission to that church on the strength of his Hartford membership, but the Wethersfield church refused to comply until he provided a "public profession." Benjamin Church senior then encouraged his son to refuse that request on the grounds that such a profession was not required in Mr. Woodbridge's church and that a person who met the test for admission in one church could not be denied membership in another church simply because requirements differed. The brethren of Wethersfield, however, did not agree with the elder Church and, on January 2, called him before the membership to be censured for counseling his son to disobey the church. Before judgment could be rendered, however, the elder Church confessed his error and the members subsequently voted only a mild admonition.[21]

The case was significant for several reasons but especially for what it revealed of discipline and authority in the Wethersfield church. First, the records did not suggest that the case was ever referred to the minister or another elder for consideration and judgment. The charges against Benjamin Church were levelled by the membership; the case was heard before the membership, and a decision rendered by the membership. Second, the case revolved around Wethersfield's requirement of a "public profession" of religious experience, implying that the membership heard and voted on the quality of a prospective applicant's conversion. Again, no mention was made of the minister or elders playing any kind of significant role in the process of screening applicants. By 1703, at least, church government and discipline in Wethersfield were firmly in the hands of the brethren.

A similar transformation took place in Hartford. That church, the "mother" church of the Valley, had known little peace between 1650 and 1670. Finally, in 1670, a council of ministers had suggested that the Presbyterians and their minister, John Haynes, withdraw and form a separate church. Instead, the Congregational adherents had withdrawn and formed the Second Church of Hartford. The members of Second Church had drawn up a covenant which was, at the same time, an explanation of their difficulties with First Church.[22] The covenant stated for all to see that the members of the new church had broken with their old friends because they believed in the "congregational way" as it was "formerly settled, professed and practised, under the guidance of the first leaders of this church of Hartford."[23] Clearly, that reference was to Hooker. No mention was made of the Cambridge Platform or the synod of 1662. The church itemized what it considered the essence of the "congregational way." Proposition one upheld that "visible saints" were the only fit matter for a church and "confederation the only form." Proposition two proclaimed the autonomy of the individual congregation. Proposition three, easily the longest and most detailed, dealt with the power of the fraternity. It announced that the elders had "the power of guidance, or leading" while the church--those in full communion--had the power to admit or receive members, to reject offenders, to administer ecclesiastical ordinances, and had the "power of judgment, consent, or privilege."[24]

As for First Church, little is known of its activities from 1670 to 1684. In the latter year it ordained a new minister, Timothy Woodbridge, a Presbyterian and son of one of New England's earliest Presbyterians, John Woodbridge of Newbury, Massachusetts. Timothy was a 1675 graduate of Harvard and was destined to become one of the colony's premier Presbyterians, an architect of Yale College, and leader of the Presbyterian forces at the Saybrook synod. The majority of the members of his church had long been associated with "Presbyterian" notions. Yet the records of Woodbridge's forty year ministry, scant as they are, are not those of a Presbyterian church. The First Church of Hartford, despite its supposed Presbyterian orientation, remained essentially a Congregational church in doctrine and discipline. The records give no hint of rule by elder but, on the contrary, give every indication of rule by membership. Such is particularly evident in Woodbridge's record of cases of discipline, the majority of which concerned fornication.[25] Each case was heard by the membership and decided by the same group. On May 10, 1703, for example, one David Ensigne, convicted of adultery and excommunicated, made a public confession of his sin before the assembled members and was accepted again into full communion by those same members. Moreover, in the same year a woman cited only as "Lydia" was brought before the church on a charge of drunkeness. She confessed her sin and her confession was accepted by the brethren.[26]

Woodbridge's record also contains other evidence of the Congregationalist orientation of the Hartford church. The "Half-Way" Covenant was practiced by the church throughout his ministry and the church covenant maintained.[27] No mention was made of the church's stand on the Saybrook Platform but Woodbridge was made moderator of one of the two ministerial associations formed in Hartford county. The effectiveness of those associations, however, remains in doubt. One of the reasons for their formation was to solve cases of discipline for individual churches. Woodbridge's record contains only one such case. In July of 1719 the Hartford church charged Major Joseph Talcott with an unnamed offense. The case proved too difficult for the church yet, instead of being passed ~~on~~ to the Hartford city association, the case was referred to Solomon Stoddard, John Williams of Deerfield and William Williams of Hatfield. On January 13, 1720 the three notified the Hartford church that "If you do freely over looke and Passe by all things that have passed between Major Talcott and yourselves as matter of offence and do upon his desire withdraw your charge you have Laid against him to prosecute it no farther and do receive him to your charity and communion, manifest your consent here-unto by your Silence. Which was done by the Church."[28]

The only aspect of the discipline of the Hartford church suggesting Presbyterianism was the church's procedure for admitting members, disapprovingly referred to as "Mr. Woodbridge's Way" by the members of the Wethersfield church. According to Stephen Mix's record in Wethersfield, Woodbridge met privately with prospective members and quizzed them as to their reasons for seeking membership. If he found their interest to be genuine he placed their names before the membership and recommended their admission. No public relation of conversion experience was required, only a public profession of faith and repentance, and the church was given no opportunity to quiz the applicant.

That method of admitting members--placing the power of judgment with the minister and admitting without public relation or trial--might have been introduced by Woodbridge. Most likely it was not for it was identical to that promoted (and possibly introduced) by Samuel Stone in the 1650's. Such a "Presbyterian" view of admission procedures was one of the sources of friction in Hartford in those years. "Mr. Woodbridge's Way" was, in all probability, the traditional way of the Hartford church.[29]

The experience of Hartford's First Church was one example of what happened to lay "Presbyterianism" in the Connecticut Valley. In 1670, after the withdrawal of the Congregational dissidents, the Presbyterians of Hartford were given an opportunity to implement the form of church government they had so adamantly defended but they did not take the opportunity. They sought no changes in the established polity of their church and remained essentially a Congregational church, although with a consistently Presbyterian ministry. In the process they demonstrated the true nature of their thirty year struggle as a struggle for power between competing factions and between ministers and people. Thus, the church may have endorsed the Saybrook Platform (and Woodbridge's role at the synod and in the subsequent

Hartford association suggests it did) yet the records of the church clearly indicate that, if such was the case, the members suffered no weakening of their own authority. The authority or power of the minister was not heightened in the slightest, a development not unlike what happened in other churches consenting to the form of church government endorsed at Saybrook.

The course of events in Windsor imitated those of Hartford. Members supposedly badly divided by Presbyterian-Congregational bitterness united in the 1680's to form a church committed to the power of the fraternity. In 1669 the "Presbyterian Party" had broken away from the original church and had established one of its own under the ministry of Benjamin Woodbridge.[30] But the new church, perhaps because of its small size, had difficulty maintaining itself and was soon showing interest in reunification with First Church (Nothing is known of the polity of the new church). Most of the new church's difficulties seemed to arise from a lack of money.

One of the issues which had originally produced dissension was the question of who would control the financial management of the church and, also, who would select the minister--church or town. Non-members had argued that, since they shared in the minister's and the church's support, they had a right to participate, particularly in the selection of clergy. By 1675 townsmen had emerged victorious and therein lay the source of Second Church's woes. In 1676 the town voted funds only for the repair of the newer structure. That placed Second Church in a real dilemma for they met in the old structure and, having been denied use of the new one, were the only residents using it. The church complained and asked for funds but the town refused. After more squabbling both sides agreed to arbitration by outsiders but the decision of that group was that the town ought to provide for the maintenance of both edifices. That was done, though evidently in considerably smaller proportion for the new church for the town controlled the funds and was loath to disseminate them to two religious bodies.[31]

Then began one of the strangest episodes in Connecticut's ecclesiastical history. By 1677 the Second Church was showing willingness to return to First Church and, at the suggestion of the General Court, a council of neighboring clergy was convened to find a formula for the orderly readmission of the members of Second Church. The formula, made public sometime in 1677, called for the united churches to adopt the "order of First Church, "which we understand to be the congregationall way of church order."[32] The method of the union was to be as follows:

> that those members of the second congregation, who were of the first congregation, return to their former station therein either in full

> communion or otherwise. And that all such members of the second congregation (whether formerly of the first church or not) being persons of competency of Knowledg and unblameable life, be also entertained to full communion with first church.[33]

If anyone objected to any persons offered for membership the persons in question were to be examined by members of the council, not by the members of First Church. In addition it was suggested that Nathaniel Chauncey continue to serve as minister of First Church "acting according to the professed congregationall principles as above exprest." Mr. Woodbridge was to be allowed to preach from time to time in the hope that eventually the two men would be able to reconcile their views and serve the church together.[34]

Second Church agreed but First Church did not. The General Court again intervened and asked the old church why it found the council's decision unacceptable. The reply demonstrated the church's rigid Congregationalism. In a petition to the Court the Windsor church argued that the council had urged the two churches to unite in the "congregational way" according to the synods of 48 and 62. Yet, the church continued, the method suggested by the council was not in accordance with congregational doctrine as the brethren understood it. The church would not "admit persons to church fellowship without inquiry into or haveing matter of satisfaction presented respecting their fitness for comunion."[35] In short, the church demanded a relation of religious experience and a public trial of every prospective member, former membership notwithstanding. That was the traditional "way" of the Windsor church. It was also the "Congregational" way. If the Council believed otherwise then they, not the church, were in error.

Thus, the issue came back to one of the essential question of the original Windsor disturbances; the correct form of admission, only this time the "Presbyterian" position was missing. The quarrel centered on two differing conceptions of the "Congregational Way" according to the Cambridge Platform and the tradition of the Windsor church. The council of ministers suggested one form of admission according to congregational principles. The church suggested another interpretation, and it was obvious to all whose view would prevail. Moreover, the members of First Church complicated matters even further by demanding, as a prerequisite of reunification, that both present ministers be fired and a new one hired.[36]

Several more councils were appointed and disbanded before reunification was accomplished. In the interim the town intervened and fired both Chauncey and Woodbridge, thus bowing to the demands of First Church and placing two able clergymen in the position of having no means of supporting their families.[37] With the churches still meeting separately the town sought a new minister. Another council of ministers had convened to settle the ecclesiastical problems of the community. That council suggested two men for the vacant position, Samuel Mather of Milford and Isaac Foster of Charlestown, Massachusetts. Both men expressed interest in the opening. Samuel Mather, formerly of the Valley towns of Deerfield and Hatfield, Massachusetts, and then serving the Milford pulpit, had no liking for the people of Milford. In a 1678 letter to his relative, Increase Mather, he mentioned that his salary in Milford was very bad. However, he went on, the real source of his discontent was his lack of authority. The good people of Milford were too rigidly Congregational to suit him, "they being of that perswasion we call anti-synodalianer."[38]

Both Mather and Foster preached in Windsor on a trial basis. Samuel Mather was received rather cooly because, though he was a Congregationalist, he was synodically inclined, which, according to John Haynes of Hartford, "diverts their thoughts from him."[39] Isaac Foster, on the other hand, was received enthusiastically by the people of Windsor, though they also had misgivings about the Reverend Foster's loyalty to Congregational principles.[40] In April, 1679, a committee of the church reported to the whole that, although it recommended Foster highly, it had a "doubtfullness still abiding concerning his persuasion in point of church order" and suggested the church send two men to Cambridge to interview him again "in case they can obtain so much from him as shall capacitate them to assert that he is congregationally persuaded according to the Synods of 48 and 62! What Foster replied to the two emissaries was not recorded but whatever it was it left a favorable impression and the committee subsequently endorsed him.[41]

The town assembled in early 1678 and cast their votes for the two men. Mather was soundly defeated, 71 to 47; Foster carried 83 to 44. The town then asked the council of ministers to intervene for them in obtaining Foster's services. The council replied shortly that they had written several letters to Bay ministers asking for help. The replies to their letters indicated that no one was really certain where Foster stood "in point of church order." The council informed the town that they had written again to those unnamed Bay ministers asking them to quiz Foster and that, if they found him in agreement with the synods of "48" and "62," they would do everything to encourage him to come. Shortly thereafter Foster informed the town of Windsor that he was not coming.[42]

Why Foster refused was a separate story but suffice to say that the "Bay ministers" referred to by the council were, in reality, only one minister, Increase Mather, and that Increase promoted the interests of his relative Samuel by doing everything in his power to keep Foster from going to Windsor. On the back of a query from Samuel Hooker of Farmington, one of the members of the council, Increase scribbled that he and others had encouraged Foster not to go to Windsor because of Mather's misgivings about the "strict congregationalism" of the church. Later, Foster went to Hartford First Church to replace the deceased John Haynes.[43]

That left Samuel Mather as the only candidate for the Windsor position. In March, 1680/1 the town voted "unanimously" to ask Mather to come for another trial. He quickly accepted but his ordination did not take place until late in 1684 and the reason was the strict congregationalism of the brethren. They could not convince themselves that Mather's views were sufficiently close to their own to guarantee tranquility. John Whiting of Hartford, writing again to Increase Mather on October 25, 1682, noted that "Mr. Samuel Mather sticks somewhat about Synod Principles, and by that meanes his settlement at Windsor seemes yet uncertaine. This day some of the Elders meete to discourse him."[44]

The settlement of Mather did not solve the problems of the old and new churches. The basic issue remained the same; how would the members of Second Church be admitted or, in some cases, readmitted, to First Church? First Church desired readmission according to its understanding of the principles of the synods of "48" and "62" (although simultaneously rejecting the authority of synods). Various ministerial councils had suggested a method conforming to a different conception of the congregational principles endorsed by those meetings. But First Church would accept no plan lessening either the power or the purity of the fraternity. The Connecticut Court tried unsuccessfully in 1679 and again in 1680 to force a merger by ordering Second Church to dissolve and rejoin its former brethren. In the first instance the new church simply refused and in the second it informed the Court that it could not rejoin the old church on the terms set down by that group. Finally, in 1682, the Court, acting again on the advice of a council of ministers, attempted to force a compromise on the two churches. The Court "ordered" that all former members of the church be instantly readmitted while non-members were to "address themselves to Mr. Mather, and haveing sattisfyed him about their experimentall knowledg and the ground of that sattisfaction by him declared to the church unto their acceptance, with encouraging testimonie given in reference to their conversation, they be there-upon admitted."[45]

That "compromise" was not a compromise to the members of First Church, it was a defeat. The Court's order adhered in every way to the earlier decisions of church councils. Old members were to be allowed to return despite the church's desire to examine them. New members were to be examined by the minister and his decision communicated to the brethren. No "public relation" was to be required and no opportunity was to be given for a public trial. The authority of the fraternity was to be ignored under the proposed settlement, except insofar as Mather was to give satisfaction "to the Church unto their acceptance, with encouraging testimonie given in reference to their conversation," that the prospective members were indeed saints.[46]

Nonetheless First Church capitulated and the saga of Windsor ended in reunification and the ordination of Samuel Mather in 1684. The church suffered immensely from the nearly three decades of continuous struggles. The records attest to the fact that from 1635 to 1677 the Windsor church experienced almost no growth. As the community, and the country, prospered and grew, First Church remained static, not even beginning to keep up, proportionately, with the general growth of the town. Yet, under Samuel Mather, that situation changed rapidly. From an average of only one and one-half new members per year (1639-73) as compared to 8 deaths and 24 births, the average zoomed to ten per year (1685-96) and it was accomplised without alteration of church government, particularly membership procedures and requirements. There was no "loosening" of admission requirements as might have been expected in a church becoming increasingly an insignificant force in the life of the town. Mather, himself, was evidently responsible for the growth.[47]

The united Windsor church maintained the rigid Congregationalism exhibited by the old church during the existence of Second Church, despite the return of the former dissenters. Power was firmly in the hands of the laity. Presbyterian-Congregational splits disappeared from the laity. Samuel Mather was the only Valley minister to attack Solomon Stoddard publicly during his fight with Increase Mather. In 1703, despite a long time friendship between the two, he wrote a stirring denunciation of Stoddard's "Instituted Church." Mather claimed he spoke for the churches of the Valley. He certainly spoke for his own.[48]

No record remains on how the Windsor church reacted to Saybrook but several facts suggest hostility. Its attitude during the period before reunification indicated complete rejection of anything impinging on congregational autonomy. Moreover, the absence of alterations in discipline during Mather's tenure suggests continuing adherence to rigid Congregationalism. East Windsor society, formed in 1699 of former First Church members, rejected the Saybrook Platform in 1708 even though its minister, Timothy Edwards, was instrumental in its creation.[49]

Developments within the churches of Hartford and Windsor were indicative of what was taking place in churches throughout the Connecticut Valley in the late seventeenth century. The brethren were on the defensive.

The clergy's attempts to regain power and authority lost during the struggles of mid-century were being felt by the laymen and they were reacting accordingly. Events in Windsor and Hartford showed clearly the ever-widening gap between clergy and people. More and more ministers embraced Presbyterianism or moderate (synodical) Congregationalism while, in the churches, laymen zealously guarded and upheld congregational autonomy and congregational authority. The disappearance of lay "Presbyterianism" in Windsor and Hartford was positive proof that the old debate between Congregationalists and Presbyterians had been only a smoke screen for the brethren's quest for power.

The attempts made by the clergy between 1675 and 1708 to regain their lost authority produced two significant developments among their parishioners, both of which were documented in the preceding discussions of Hartford and Windsor. First was the rise of a theory of rigid Congregationalism among the laity which centered on the unbridled power of the fraternity and the complete autonomy of the individual congregation and was buttressed by the fraternity's peculiar interpretation of the meaning of the Cambridge Platform. Second, and equally important, was a fierce resistance to alterations in discipline, regardless of whether or not they affected power relationships within the congregations. At a time when New England was beset by religious persuasions of all types, from Anabaptist to Quaker, Congregationalist to Church of England, the churches of the Connecticut Valley stubbornly resisted any and all alterations in doctrine or polity. Churches which had, only a few decades before, veered wildly between Congregationalism and Presbyterianism suddenly became bastions of conservatism, showing unusual veneration for things past and for tradition and traditional ways of action.

Increase and Cotton Mather had bitterly attacked Solomon Stoddard for deviating from the supposed polity of the fathers. Cotton's Magnalia had dripped with a sentimental attachment for the heritage of the past. Stoddard, Benjamin Colman, Timothy Woodbridge and a host of others had replied, in bewilderment, that the New England the Mathers envisioned had, so far as they knew, never existed. The unity, the orthodoxy, which Cotton and Increase had attributed to the likes of Cotton, Shepard, Hooker, Wilson and Davenport was, they argued, a myth. But myth or not, the Mathers voiced a sentiment which, by 1690 or 1700, was gospel among most of the laity. The membership of the Valley churches put aside their old differences and wrote paeans to the wisdom of the past, zealously protecting the practices of their churches--their heritage from that past--from all real and imagined encroachments.

In Hartford the members spoke reverently of the ways of the founders, particularly Hooker, and resisted the Presbyterianism of a Timothy Woodbridge or a Solomon Stoddard. They protected and nurtured the practices they assumed had been handed to them by the founders even though Hooker would have found little satisfaction in their admission procedure or in their acceptance of the Half-Way Covenant. In Wethersfield the same was true. A church torn by decades of controversy suddenly adhered strictly to a particular form of church government and the practices associated therewith, even though its minister allied himself with Stoddardeanism. In Northampton--Stoddard's own church--the same pattern was exhibited. In the 1660's, the church's formative decade, experimentation was the rule. The requirements for admission were altered on several occasions. The Half-Way Covenant was rejected then adopted. A special "state of education" was created for prospective members; a new church covenant replaced the old one. All of this happened in the short space of time between the death of Eleazer Mather and the arrival of Stoddard. After Stoddard's arrival further changes were made in baptismal and admission requirements. Then, for the next three decades, the church withstood the onslaught of the country's most famous, and most outspoken, reformer; acceding to him on a change--or loosening--of admission requirements, but refusing on several occasions to endorse his view on the sacraments or to surrender congregational power. True, in Northampton innovation was opposed without odes to the founders or references to the sanctity of the Cambridge Platform, but it was opposed nonetheless, just as it was in Hartford and Wethersfield. Northampton eventually gave in--to a point--as Wethersfield and Hartford did not, but the latter were not served by Stoddard. It was a credit to Stoddard that he managed to stay in Northampton as long as he did in a situation of such duress when lesser mortals such as Chauncey or Woodbridge--or Jonathan Edwards--were sent packing.

The fact that churches in Windsor, or Wethersfield, or Hartford, or Norwich proclaimed adherence to the "Congregational Way" as expressed in the synods of "48" and "62" did not mean, however, that their disciplines were identical. The most striking impression given by the records of the Valley churches of the period is that, while promoting and protecting the "power of the fraternity," while protecting the "traditional" practices of the churches against innovation, polities varied considerably. Each church, however, considered itself a "Congregational" church and each believed that its own polity conformed to the mythical ideal of the "Congregational Way" as spelled out in the Cambridge Platform. If there was any unity of either disciplinary theory or practice to be found in the Valley churches, however, it was in the assertion of the unrestricted power of the fraternity as the essence of church polity.

Beyond a fundamental agreement on the "power of the fraternity" the phrase "Congregational Way" meant all things to all churches. In the Valley practice did not conform to theory, theory conformed to practice. The "Congregational Way" was what each church said it was and that interpretation had the force of law. What happened in Windsor when the church argued with a council of ministers over the "congregational" form of admitting members was symptomatic of the attitude of every congregation. To the Windsor church the synods of "48" and "62" justified their own way of admitting members and they would not change that view even though clergy accused them of error.

In the records of those late seventeenth century churches the historian obtains more than an inkling of parochialism. Apparently the brethren were neither aware of nor interested in the practices of neighboring churches or the views of neighboring ministers. In the middle of the seventeenth century they had wrenched control of their destinies from the clergy. By the late seventeenth century they were justifying that power by references to congregational theory and the decisions of ancient synods. But they were neither steeped in such theory nor aware of the intricacies of debates among adherents to competing polities. Thus, in going beyond the basic assumption of lay power to specific practices in areas such as membership, baptism, censure and a host of others, those churches relied on their own experience and viewed traditional practices as "correct." Thus, in Windsor, for example, the use of the term "Congregational Way" did not mean that the good people of Windsor had carefully scrutinized the Cambridge Platform to make certain that their practices conformed to it. Quite the contrary, the nature of the "Congregational Way" was the way things were done in Windsor. That Congregationalism was interpreted differently in Hartford or Wethersfield meant little or nothing to the Windsor brethren, even assuming that they were aware of such differences. If Windsor discovered that Hartford employed a different method for admitting members then Hartford, not Windsor, was wrong. That was certainly the implication of neighboring Wethersfield's action against John Church, senior. The Wethersfield church, according to its own statement, admitted new members according to the "Congregational Way." If the Hartford church admitted members according to "Mr. Woodbridge's Way" then it was in error. Each church had its own interpretation of the nature of Congregational discipline, an interpretation defined solely in terms of the traditional practice of the church. That it conformed or differed with the practice of another church was a matter of indifference.

A glance at the admission procedures of the "congregational" churches of the Connecticut Valley in the late seventeenth century reveals as much. Practices differed widely yet all were labeled congregational. Some clergymen tolerated such differences because they did not necessarily suggest differences on congregational "fundamentals." But to individual churches the correct method of admitting new members was a "fundamental." There was but one correct way and that was the way of their church. Whether an applicant gave a public confession, a private one, or no confession at all were not matters of indifference. It was important, and more than one church was split or a minister asked to go elsewhere because of differing views.

In Wethersfield an applicant was required to give a public relation of his conversion before the assembled members. That was the test of his fitness for communion. After his relation came a lengthy period of quizzing by the members on aspects of his experience and also his character. Then came a vote by the membership. In Hartford it was done differently. An applicant was screened by the minister and his life and character scrutinized at length by the elders. The results were then communicated to the membership for their vote. Was there a difference on fundamentals between the two churches? Apparently there was for Benjamin Church, Sr. was nearly suspended by the Wethersfield church for his attempt to get his son into the church by claiming that if he was saint enough for Hartford he ought to be saint enough for Wethersfield.[50]

The church in Farmington, Connecticut, utilized a procedure nearly identical to Windsor's; that is, the candidate was called before the members of the church where he gave a relation of his conversion experience and evidence of his Christian knowledge. He was then questioned and his candidacy brought to a vote. The records of Farmington are, however, unique among Valley churches in that they contain an account of the trial of an applicant, an account which reveals that Farmington and Windsor were not really the same at all. The record is dated June 15, 1673. The candidate's name was James Bird. The account of the examination, recorded in the church records by the minister, indicated that the members assembled at the home of Deacon Hart. "After an examination of his knowledge," the minister wrote, "and a brief narrative given by the said James of his experience, the mind of the church was taken. About 8 brethren voted for his admission, 3 against it; the major part by much chose to suspend acting either way."[51] James Bird, the account continued, "seeing so many of the brethren to hesitate and suspend, refused to close and write with the Church. Whereupon the pastor told the said James that the Church did expect of those that joined, and consequently of him: That he should promise to Submit to the government of Christ in his house, were Church his brethren (sic) and serve and keep all the commandments of God, as far as Christ should enable."[52]

Several facts suggested that in Bird's case the church placed little emphasis on the relation of experience as the most important qualification for membership. The minister referred only to Bird's "brief narrative." Moreover, the church made no attempt to question him about his experience, nor did the minister offer, nor was he asked, to comment on it or to give the result of some private conference with the man. Yet immediately after the "relation" a vote was taken; one unfavorable to the candidate. Obviously the members had formed a prior judgment of the man. But if it was not based on the quality of his conversion experience, then on what? The minister's remarks following the vote suggested considerable doubt about the quality of Bird's character and, particularly his ability to accept the discipline and watch of the church. Bird himself alluded to that doubt when, after hearing the minister say that every member had to adhere to the government of Christ and keep the commandments of God "as far as Christ should enable," Bird turned to the church and stated "That as sometime of old, so be in the present case; As the Lord liveth, I will not close with your proposal" and so departed the house. And, as he was going forth, he added, "I desire you to take care of my wife." Bird seemed to recognize that, though a majority of the votes were cast in his favor, an even larger number of persons abstained, thus showing disfavor. Bird then refused to accept the offer of "closing" and, when the minister attempted to offer his solace by mentioning the high standard of conduct expected of a member, Bird stated his inability to meet such a standard and left the meeting. Eight years later, however, he was received as a member.[53] The minister who recorded the case was Samuel Hooker, son of Thomas, and member of the Windsor Council which would, a few years later, propose a form of admission procedure to the Windsor church which would be rejected by that church as not conforming to the "Congregational Way."

In the case of James Bird the relation of religious experience was apparently not a factor in the church's attitude toward him. In fact Hooker's record of the event suggested that the relation was little more than a perfunctory practice. That such was true was attested to by two motions adopted by the church in 1707. Those motions, together, stated that an "explication given of an evidence" was to be automatically accepted by the church "unless it evidently appears to contain a falsehood in it." That merely legalized a practice obviously employed in the Bird case thirty-four years earlier. The resolutions also demonstrated the church's hesitancy to abolish an established practice, even one which had long since fallen into disuse.[54]

The First Church of Middletown provided another example of the almost limitless varieties of admission procedures employed in the churches of the Valley. That church was organized in 1668 with representatives of Windsor, Hartford, Farmington and Northampton present. The first minister was Nathaniel Collins. The church adopted the peculiar practice of requiring relations from some persons but not from others. An example occurred on December 30, 1668, when several persons were admitted to full communion, each "consenting to the profession of faith and plighting the covenant." A report of their Christian knowledge and the "Ground and reason for their hope" was given by the minister and the church then voted on admission. Yet on January 17 of the same year one Samuel Cornwell was admitted by "consenting to the Profession of Faith and the Covenant" but without a public relation or the report of a private relation by the minister. So far as can be discerned this discrimination was continued by the church for an indefinite period. The record of admissions, at least those to 1700, continued to show that more was expected of some applicants than others.[55]

The process of having an elder, preferably the minister, examine an applicant and give a report was the same as that utilized by a number of churches, including Timothy Woodbridge's Hartford church. Yet the process was not kept long by Middletown. In June, 1672, Mary Collins was admitted to full communion by "giveing in writing (which was read) an acoount of the ground of her hope in Christ."[56] That procedure was retained in all future cases where a relation was required.

The Westfield church under Edward Taylor utilized one of the most rigid tests of membership among the churches. That was the process of having an applicant appear before the church and give the "time and manner" of his conversion. His narrative was then considered by the church and acted upon. In Westfield "time and manner" meant a recitation of the time, the place, and the manner in which conversion occurred. Edward Taylor, for example, in giving his own relation before the church, spent several hours recounting the events of his conversion, beginning with the earliest recollections of his childhood.[57]

How many churches utilized that procedure is impossible to tell for few churches requiring public professions ever indicated the exact nature of those professions in their records. It is entirely possible that the Windsor church, for example, required such a test. The records imply it, though they do not state it. At any rate sentiment for "time and manner" was prevalent among the laity, and it was Samuel Stone's rebuttal of such sentiments which had touched off the Hartford controversies of the 1650's. In Westfield the practice continued until Taylor's death in 1727 when such professions were discontinued.[58]

Neighboring Northampton, on the other hand, represented the other extreme. In 1692 Stoddard's church adopted the "Presbyterian" or "loose" form of admission procedure with a good share of the responsibility for determining the fitness of the applicant being placed in the hands of the minister. The candidate was interviewed by the minister, or minister and other elders, and quizzed about the state of his soul and the reason for his "hope." At the same time the applicant stood "propounded" before the church for a period of two weeks. If during that period no members came forward with a complaint against the "life" or "conversation" of the applicant, he was admitted; assuming, of course, that the minister found him to be sincere in his desire to close with the church.[59] That procedure was, however, not unique to Stoddard. It was nearly identical to the procedure advocated by Samuel Stone in his treatise and was similar to the practice of First Church of Hartford and to others as well.

In several ways it resembled the practice of First Church of New London during the ministries of Gurdon Saltonstall and his successor, Eliphalet Adams. Saltonstall was, apparently, an adherent to Stoddard's notions. Adams was a Presbyterian, though never sympathetic to Stoddard. The church was formed in 1670. Saltonstall arrived in 1687 and Adams replaced him in 1708 when the former became Governor of the colony. Despite decades of a Presbyterian ministry the church seems not to have wavered from a congregational polity. Yet, in the procedure for admission the presence of Congregational brethren and Presbyterian elders produced a compromise practice, just as a similar combination produced a compromise in Northampton. Strangers to the church were "propounded" before the members for a certain period of time (probably two weeks) at the end of which they were brought before the church for a relation of religious experience and vote. If they passed they repeated the procedure a second time, only before the entire congregation. If they passed that test they were admitted to communion. "Children" of the church were required, however, to do nothing to gain admission. If, upon reaching adult age, they were considered sound in doctrine and blameless in life they were admitted automatically.[60] That complicated procedure was the practice of the church until 1726 when a relation of experience was dropped for outsiders because "divers persons of good character and deportment stand off from joining us because a relation of experience is insisted on."[61]

Several conclusions can be drawn from this brief survey of the practice of the Valley churches during the late seventeenth century. Above all else can be seen the innate conservatism of the members; their reluctance to accept change. Available records indicate that only one church, Northampton, made a significant alteration in admission practice between 1675 and 1708 and that alteration was, in many ways, consistent with the traditions of the church and its people. Moreover, the variety of admission procedures tends to support the argument that the phrase "Congregational Way" implied no commonly accepted body of doctrine to the laity beyond the basic assumption of the power of the fraternity. Each church defined the nature of Congregational polity according to its traditional practices and beliefs not according to the ideas of Congregational theorists or the decisions of synods. Finally, the nature of admission procedures only buttresses the notion of group consciousness and the sense of power typical of those members. While churches varied considerably in the amount of significance given the relation of conversion experience as a prerequisite for membership, all seemed to place great stress on the character, or, as Stoddard called it, the "conversation" of the candidate. The James Bird case in Farmington was typical of the careful scrutiny of a prospective member by the other members to ascertain whether he could maintain the high standard of conduct expected of him. The two week period common to many churches was established so that all charges or grievances against the candidate could be aired and investigated, all grudges brought into the open, and also so that any possible character defects could be discovered before admission. Many churches had what they called "states of education" or "initiation" wherein candidates were placed for a period of time in a condition of probation. Their character and conduct were assessed, defects pointed out and remedies suggested. Then, after a period of months or even years, they were either admitted or they were not, depending on how they reacted to being placed under the discipline of the church.

During those years the ministry lamented that religion was waning, the churches were dying, people were becoming worldly and too interested in "externals." That may have been true. Perhaps personal piety was declining but, if so, it was not evident in membership requirements. The requirements varied considerably in stringency but, whatever might be said of them, they were not lax. It was simply not easy to join a Valley church. Purity was guarded even in Stoddard's church, noted for its "loose" principles. A church might not be certain as to the real condition of the successful applicants soul but of one thing they could be certain, his conduct was judged according to the highest standards of moral behavior.

If membership policies varied considerably no less than the same was true of the application of the Half-

Way Covenant. The Half-Way Covenant, adopted by synod at Boston in 1662, had created a special status of membership for non-regenerates whose parents or grandparents had been full members (either one or both). Supposedly those special members were allowed all of the benefits of membership except communion and voting (though the latter varied considerably). The theory was to place non-regenerates under the watch and discipline of the church so that they would not become "profane." Also, it was to allow their children to be baptized and brought up in the church.

The idea of such a covenant was argued in New England from the country's beginning. In the Connecticut Valley it was a lively issue in the late 1640's and 50's, was rejected by Thomas Hooker in the Survey but endorsed by his colleague Samuel Stone. Hooker considered it an unscriptural practice but most of its opponents considered it an "innovation" dangerous to the purity of church membership. Most advocates, like Cambridge's Thomas Shepard, argued that it was a remedy for a weakness in congregational theory; that, until the establishment of New England's churches, no one had envisioned the formation of such a group of people outside the watch of a particular church yet having ties to it. That was Samuel Stone's feeling as well, though he did not use Shepard's reference to congregational theory. Such a class of people existed in 1650, he had argued, had existed from the beginning and grew larger each year. It was the church's responsibility to provide for them.[62]

In seeking to explain why New England adopted the Half-Way Covenant, historians have tended to adopt the arguments of its opponents that it was a sign of the decay of congregational purity, a crack in New England's Congregationalist orthodoxy and an "innovation" brought about by the failure of the second generation to maintain the piety of the first. That view, of course, carries the assumption that the polity of each New England church was alike and predetermined either in England or at a very early period in the Bay Colony's history and ignores the very obvious fact that clergy and laymen had discussed the need for such a special status from the beginning.

Although most Valley churches either adopted or rejected the Half-Way Covenant soon after the 1662 synod, it produced dissension in several churches in the 1660's and 1670's. Much of the pressure for such a covenant came from nonmembers whose concern was not so much for their own condition as that of their children who were denied the sacrament of baptism. Clearly the issue in most churches was not the present generation but future generations. Persons outside the church desired a special membership status not because they hoped for full membership for themselves, but because they feared for their children's spiritual welfare. They could not tolerate the thought of their children growing up unbaptized and outside the watch of the church. Within the churches the feeling was much the same. Little real concern was expressed for the plight of adult non-members or for any real or imagined decay of religion which their increasing numbers might represent. Rather, concern was directed toward the children who, because of their parents failings, were consigned to a permanent position beyond the walls of the church and were denied the most elemental of all Christian sacraments--baptism.

But the most interesting--and significant--aspect of the history of the Half-Way Covenant was not the debate over its adoption but the ways in which it was administered by individual churches. The picture which emerges is the same as that of admission requirements. There was simply no universally accepted interpretation of the nature of half-way status. It meant one thing in Northampton, something else in Hartford, and something completely different in Farmington or Windsor.[63] Churches simply could not agree on a uniform definition of what it was. Moreover, they appeared to be either ignorant of other interpretations, or indifferent, or both.

Nor were churches willing to alter their practice to conform to that of another church. As in admission policies, Congregationalism was what a particular church said it was and if another church or minister differed, it was they who were in error. The records of the churches of the Valley during that period show clearly that the nature of the Half-Way Covenant was not determined by the decision of any synod. Half-way membership meant what a particular church wanted it to mean and, if someone attempted to tell the brethren that their practice did not conform to the position adopted by the Synod of 1662, the brethren informed them that their thinking was otherwise.

Northampton provided an excellent example of that diversity. In 1668, after years of oppositon, the church bowed to outside pressure and adopted the Covenant, rationalizing its act by saying that it wanted to bring its own practices into conformity with those of the rest of the country. The purpose of the Covenant was to allow the children of confederates the right to baptism (owning the covenant was, of course, restricted to unregenerate offspring of members). That status was given the title of a "state of education," which meant that it was, in truth, a special status given to persons who were marked for eventual full membership. Later the "state of education" was dropped at Stoddard's instigation. Moreover, after 1672, children of the church, upon reaching their majority, began to be automatically admitted to full communion if their lives were not "scandalous." What that meant was that half-way status was no longer considered half-way to full membership but was reserved for those who did not want or could not get full membership but wanted baptism for their children. Furthermore, in that baptized children of the church were more or less automatically made full members, it also meant that half-way members were, by and large, strangers coming from other churches.

In 1714 the Northampton church agreed to baptize all "professing Christians" and their off-spring who desired it and to place all such persons in the "parish" under church watch. That, apparently, nullified the other justification for a half-way status. Yet the covenant remained as a part of the polity of the Northampton church. It was not abolished in 1714 nor, seemingly, at any later date. What it was supposed to accomplish after 1714 is not known.[64]

In Middletown, Connecticut a somewhat different interpretation was given to half-way status. There, similar to Northampton's "state of education," a half-way member was referred to as being in a "State of Initiation." But the peculiar nature of their practice was to be found in the type of person generally admitted to that status. It was open, primarily, to children of church members and was considered the preliminary to full membership. For example, on February 25, 1671, the children of several church members were brought together, were given an explanation of the meaning of the church covenant, the profession of faith, church discipline, what it meant to look inside oneself for a work of God, then owned the covenant and entered the state of initiation.[65] One other type of person was admitted occasionally to the state of initiation; a person coming to Middletown from another church. Those persons, if non-members in their old communities, entered the state of initiation until such time as the church saw fit to grant them full membership. Such a case occurred on January 26, 1672 when one "Isaak Johnson being recommended to us from the Church of Christ at Roxbury owneing the confession of faith and order wherein this Church stands Ingaged together with their covenant and was accepted as a member of this Church in the State of Initiation."[66]

That special status granted to new arrivals in the community also was meant to serve those not seeking membership but desirous of having their children baptized. Such a provision was made at the time of the formation of the church in 1668 when it was resolved that "all members of orthadox, (sic) being sound in the faith and not scandalous in life, presenting due testimony thereof, these occasionally comeing from one church to another...may have their children baptized."[67] But those persons were first expected to covenant with the church before receiving either discipline or the sacraments. It was not until the 1680's that mention was made of persons "owning the covenant" and having their children baptized, but that was, seemingly, not a shift from previous practice. Persons new to the community were mentioned as owning the covenant rather than entering a state of initiation because such persons were rare. However, no similar provision was made for old residents of the community who were non-members but who had "confederate" ties to the church.[68]

Two more examples of irregularity are to be found in the records of First Church of Woodbury, Connecticut. The minister, Hezekiah Walker, who began the records of that church in 1678, had spent the previous eight years as minister of Second Church of Stratford (1670-78) and took the early records of that church with him to Woodbury when he moved. Thus, the records of Woodbury reveal the practices of two churches.

The church at Stratford was formed illegally (that is, with no one's permission) in 1670 by dissidents from First Church. All of those people were non-members of First Church and left, evidently, because they were continually refused admission. After forming their own church they adopted the Half-Way Covenant but placed no restrictions on those eligible for that status; that is, they did not require prior baptism nor did they specify that an applicant have a blood tie to a church member. They needed only be professing Christians. Thus, on May 4, 1670, one Moses Johnson "desiring admission into fellowship with this church: after having been a fortnight propounded, there appearing no objections against his admission he was examined concerning his knowledge in the matters of religion, and desiring after the ordinance and discipline of Christ, and having given a satisfactory account, was admitted, and subscribed the covenant." Five days later the same Moses Johnson was baptized.[69]

In 1678 Hezekiah Walker went to Woodbury and remained until his death in 1698. The Woodbury church was not a Half-Way Covenant church when he arrived and did not become one until 1708 (under its new minister, Anthony Stoddard, son and follower of Solomon). The Covenant was practiced until 1720, when, for no apparent reason, it was stopped. Then, in 1730, covenanted members again began to appear in the records.

The only discernable peculiarity of the Covenant as practiced in Woodbury was that, like Stratford, it was open to all professing Christians and was often a prelude to baptism. It was not simply a prerequisite for baptism however, as evidenced by the first group to own the covenant in 1708, who were described as owning their "baptismal Covenant."[70] The tie between the two groups--baptized and unbaptized--was to be found in the membership lists of the Woodbury church. Between 1678 and 1730 of some 300 persons admitted to the church nearly 70 percent were females, out-numbering the male members over two to one. Of persons owning the Covenant under Anthony Stoddard nearly 60 percent were male. The point was obvious. Men were simply not joining the church. Furthermore, most of the women joining the church were already married. An analysis of the covenant lists under Stoddard reveals a considerable number of husbands of women who were already members. Seemingly then, the main purpose of the Half-Way Covenant in Woodbury was to entice husbands into the church and to place them within its discipline even though they might not seek or attain full communion. Thus, the Half-Way Covenant in Woodbury was instituted not to remedy declining church membership--which was always high--but to check the decline of male members.[71]

The predominance of women on the rolls of new members was true in nearly every church whose records extend back to at least 1670. And in each church the percentage of male to female members was approximately the same: two women joined for every man. Conversely, the rolls of half-way members are dominated by men in about the same ratio as found in Woodbury; six men to every four women. However, the Woodbury church appears to have been the only one where a conscious attempt was made to use the Half-Way Covenant as a device to entice men, baptized or not, to come under church watch. In most churches the number of half-way members becoming full members was very low--from 10 to 20 percent--with most churches around 15 percent. In addition, most half-way members who became full members were women. Men simply were not joining the churches of Connecticut in sizeable numbers in the last decades of the seventeenth century. Furthermore, the indications are clear that most men did not want to join and were happy to accept permanent half-way status.[72]

The First Church of Hartford provides an example of a church utilizing the half-way status solely for the purpose of infant baptism. No one was admitted to half-way status in Hartford who had not been previously baptised. Hartford's half-way members were not, as in some churches, simply "professing" Christians but were those seeking renewal of their "baptismal covenant." They were, thus, the sons, daughters and grandchildren of church members. Moreover, contrary to the practice of many churches, half-way status in Hartford was not dominated by males and thus, was obviously not a station designed to bring men under church watch. In the last decades of the seventeenth and early years of the eighteenth centuries, new members in First Church of Hartford were numerous and almost evenly divided between males and females. Between 1692 and 1707 the church averaged twenty new members each year. Of those, a remarkably large number were husbands and wives who joined simultaneously, something also not found in other churches.

In those same years new half-way members numbered about the same; approximately twenty a year. However, few of those persons ever became full members (only about one in five) and, of those who joined, their lengths of time as half-way members varied considerably, thus suggesting that half-way status was also not a period of preparation for full membership.[73] Instead, the records of the church suggest that half-way status was utilized for purposes consistent with the thinking of the Synod of 1662. Most of those who "owned" the covenant were young adults, perhaps in their twenties; persons likely to have small children and thus to be interested in owning the covenant and obtaining the sacrament of baptism for those children.

Furthermore, the implication of the records is that those seeking half-way membership had little desire to become full members. The admission requirements of the Hartford church, while not lax, were not nearly so stringent as many churches. The church did not want for new members, nor did it have an imbalance between men and women. Yet as many persons opted for half-way status as sought full membership. Their youth, plus the fact that few ever became full members, suggests that their purpose in owning the covenant was not so much related to their own futures as to those of their offspring.[74]

These then, in brief, were some of the distinguishing marks of church life and growth in Connecticut and the Connecticut Valley in the years from 1675 to 1708. The old uncertainty, volatility, and experimental outlook exhibited by the brethren in earlier years had given way to implacable conservatism; to adherence to values, ideas and practices discerned as traditional. "Presbyterianism" had disappeared from the laity. The exercise of power, of control, which was the legacy of the church disputes of mid-century had become the essential ingredient of the polity of every church. It was called the "Congregational Way" and was rationalized as being the way of the New England churches according to the Synods of "48" and "62"; particularly the Cambridge Platform. Yet, a close analysis of the practices of individual churches reveals that, beyond the adherence to, and jealous protection of, the power of the fraternity, there was little real uniformity of belief or practice. Churches defined the "way" of the New England churches in terms of their own experience and their own practices. They were largely ignorant of and indifferent to the practices of other churches and operated on the assumption that where differences existed others were in error.

The most startling trait of the churches in 1708 was their obvious mental isolation. They were hostile to outside forces seeking to meddle in their affairs, fiercely resistant to change, and totally lacking in awareness of common problems linking their own destinies with those of neighboring churches. They operated in separate worlds. Their interests and concerns seemed to stop at the boundaries of their communities. They were introspective. Their admission practices suggested a kind of "clubbishness." Practices varied considerably from church to church but rigidity did not. Moreover, differing emphasis might be placed on the importance of the conversion experience but on the necessity of high moral conduct there was universal agreement. No church admitted anyone who had not been first scrutinized by all members for signs of less than exemplary behavior. Yet, despite their rigid standards, the churches prospered and numbers of admissions remained high. Their numbers increased while their minds closed. While the ministry worried about the decline of religion among the general populace, the churches worried about maintaining purity of membership and discipline. While the ministry sought ecclesiastical unity in a platform of church discipline, seeing that as a first step to a general "reformation" of religion in the country as a whole, the brethren agonized over who would sit in the pews.[75]

By 1708 the clergy exhibited a group consciousness not present fifty years before. They viewed their problems as being common to all and sought solutions applicable to all. Thus, in matters of discipline, they tended toward Presbyterianism in that they favored a church government which allowed the churches to act in unison against the evil and worldliness rising in the country. The clergy wanted power and to gain that power they needed unity. To attain that unity not only meant that the churches would have to be tied together under a common government it also meant they would have to agree on fundamentals of doctrine and discipline.

But at the same time that the ministry sought to work in concert the brethren upheld local autonomy. They refused to think in terms of Connecticut, or of New England. Rather, they thought only in terms of Hartford or Windsor. The problems they recognized were local ones to be dealt with locally. They were like separate colonies unaware of, and uninterested in, the outside world. Thus, while the ministers, in their agony over the decline of religion in the country and the loss of their own authority, sought refuge in a Platform of Discipline which was a mixture of Congregationalism and Presbyterianism, the churches, in their parochialism, found unity in rigid Congregationalism. But it was a unity which went no further than common adherence to the "power of the fraternity." Power was a word that determined the nature of the ecclesiastical development of Connecticut and the Connecticut Valley in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. It was all-important to the brethren who wanted to protect it, and the ministers who wanted to regain it.

Conclusion:
The New Piety and the Old Struggle, 1708-1725

The failure of the Saybrook Platform did not end the Valley ministry's attempts to restore lost authority in the society. Neither did it diminish the long cherished ministerial belief that religion would decay and New England would fall unless the institutional tensions which had plagued church and society in Connecticut for generations were somehow resolved. A majority of clergymen did, however, alter their view of the reasons for those tensions, finally discarding the old notion that the churches problems were the result of a new world extension of the old world debates among Presbyterians and Congregationalists. They discarded, as well, the notion, also cherished for decades, that institutional antagonisms could be resolved for all time through the creation of an ecclesiastical constitution legalizing clerical power and simultaneously providing Connecticut with a common form of church government embodying the essence of Congregationalism and Presbyterianism. The ministers resurrected the theory that they had lost their power because their parishoners had consciously sought to strip them of it, and that the same procedure had been repeated within all the institutions of Valley society. Legitimate authority had been overthrown by a people seeking only self-aggrandizement. "Worldliness" was the word used to describe that new spirit. Men's hearts were dead, their zeal for Christ dissipated. Religion was dying because men were forsaking God for mammon.

Thus the ministry returned to the position held in the years after the great controversies of the mid-seventeenth century, arguing again that the real solution lay in a reformation of the heart. Once again the emphasis for New England's plight was placed on the brethren who had so recently frustrated yet another attempt by the clergy to bring God's favor and guidance back to the land. The people were obviously in a state of sin, their love for God and Christ hopelessly inundated by vanity, pride, and worldliness. They needed to be awakened to the fact that their infatuation with their own worth, the "self-love" that typified their lust for power, was a sure sign that they were a people already far along the road to perdition.

Thus, as one historian has recently--and correctly--noted, after Saybrook the clergy sought to turn the minds and hearts of the people back toward God, but in a manner which would neither cause further harm to the already weakened ecclesiastical structure of the Valley nor create new antagonisms between ministers and people, churches and towns, churches and churches, and laymen and laymen.[1] As Bumsted notes in his article on Norwich, they did so by developing a new and radical pietism. It differed from the pietism of the 1670's and 1680's in that it did not merely emphasize the performance of religious duties designed to promote inner piety: "reforming" covenants, rigorous attendance of the sacraments, daily family prayer, daily family bible study, periods set aside each day for private meditation and prayer and the like. That piety had envisioned the minister as leader--as teacher--showing his flock what could be done to cause mind and heart to dwell on God and Christ and not on the self. But the minister could only guide, ultimate success was up to the layman.

The new "radical" piety placed the emphasis solely on the minister and on his function as dispenser of the Word of God. It emphasized--or perhaps re-emphasized--that man was helpless to reform himself. It emphasized also that God had provided an agency for man's salvation--the Word--as well as an agent for the dispensation of the Word--the minister. Thus, at the heart of the new piety was what Solomon Stoddard called the "powerful preacher," the belief that the preacher dispensing the Word was the primary means of man's salvation. Neither preacher nor Word was effective without the other. The clergy argued that the hearts of the people were thickly encrusted with a coating of self-love and that before God could enter such hearts that "crust" had to be destroyed. But how was that to be done? The new piety proclaimed that the Word was to be sent like a thunderbolt into the heart of the sinner by the minister! The only proper frame of mind for receiving grace was a humility brought about by an overwhelming sense of sinfullness and, more important, of an inability to change. Such humility--the opposite of self-love--could be created only by a "powerful preacher" dispensing the truths of the Gospel, by a minister who filled his listeners with an awesome sense of their own sinfulness, of the terrors of Hell awaiting the sinner, and the sinner's inability to avoid such terrors. Then, once the sinner admitted his awful condition, once he recognized his helplessness and threw himself upon God's mercy, the minister could reveal to the heart yet another truth of the Gospel: that Christ's blood was his only hope. God had given his only Son to pay for the crimes of men. That was the nature of the Atonement and it was the preacher's role to convey its true meaning to man.

None of that doctrine was new to the Valley. What was new was the awesome importance of the minister in conversion. He was man's only hope. The Word was the source of regeneration but it was effective only in the hands of God's henchmen on earth, the ministers. The writings of the Valley ministry after Saybrook were full of references to the Apostle Paul as the archtype of the powerful preacher and agent for conversion. Paul's ministry was that of an itinerant evangelist, dispensing the Word and bringing souls to Christ. Of equal importance to the Valley clergymen were Paul's pronouncements on regeneration and the nature of the conversion experience. There were but two principal ingredients for conversion, he had argued, the minister and the Word. Neither was "efficacious" without the other but together they were devastating.[2]

Missing from the new rhetoric was any reference to the instituted church (the sacraments) or the "house of worship" as essential to salvation. Such a lack was especially apparent in Solomon Stoddard who for decades had upheld the "instituted church" and its sacraments as the hope of man's salvation. Suddenly, he reversed his position and references to "converting ordinances" or salvation as an institutional function of Christ's church disappeared from his writings. A new Stoddard emerged; one who saw conversion solely in Pauline terms. Salvation was a function of the minister and the Word and might come to the sinner whenever those two forces were present. The institutional church was irrelevant to the process. Stoddard's second and last book, _A Guide to Christ_ (1714) was the definitive statement on the new piety and it bore little resemblance to the earlier _Doctrines of the Instituted Churches_.

That this new piety would produce a Great Awakening was the clergy's intent. An itinerant, evangelistic ministry became the ideal for significant segments of the clergy. Its realization started haltingly in such efforts as the Hampshire Association's establishment of weekly public lectures (around 1712) in which members travelled from town to town giving "reforming sermons" and attempting to stimulate religious revivals.[3] Later that practice became more informal as some ministers spent much of their time travelling and spreading the Word. The ultimate in that development was, of course, the itinerant ministry of a George Whitefield.

The clergy continually looked for signs of "Awakening." Stoddard had long been known for his Northampton "harvests" and was a source of inspiration to all evangelicals. Then other men began to have similar successes. Finally, in the 1720's revivals became frequent and took the form of mass conversions or, in the ministers' rhetoric, great "outpourings of the Spirit." In 1722, Eliphalet Adams of New London travelled to Windham, Connecticut, to commemorate a revival in that community and to praise the minister whose preaching had brought it about. He told an assembled gathering that revivals, though still widely scattered, were no longer uncommon and a "Great Awakening" appeared imminent.[4]

Adams, of course, was correct. An Awakening would come to the Connecticut Valley in a short time. But its effects were the opposite of what the clergy expected. Rather than resolving old institutional antagonisms the "Awakening" merely increased them. As Professor Bumsted has demonstrated in his study of Norwich, the radical pietism of the clergy was used by the brethren to add fuel to the deep-seated personal and institutional antagonisms already present in that community; especially those between church and pastor, church and town, and brethren and brethren. The evangelicals had hoped an Awakening would resolve such antagonisms and return the clergy to a position of authority and leadership in the society and within the churches. It accomplished neither. The decades old struggles in Norwich among competing factions resulted in the Awakening in the dissolution of the church. In Northampton, where the authority of Jonathan Edwards confronted the power of the fraternity the issue was never in doubt. When a bewildered Edwards sought refuge among the Indians at Stockbridge he merely provided new evidence for a principle enunciated nearly a century before; that the power of the people was sacrosanct.

Professor Bunsted has suggested quite accurately that the Great Awakening and its accompanying institutional disruption was the result of an evangelical pietism injected into an institutional structure already fraught with tension and division. But the error of most students of Connecticut and the Connecticut Valley is the assumption that such disruption and the accompanying struggle for power among competing groups was a uniquely eighteenth century phenomenon. Such an assumption is predicated on a faulty notion that the seventeenth century was a time of civil and ecclesiastical tranquility in New England; a time when the locus of authority was well-defined and entrenched in magistrates and clergy; a time when the thoughts of men were on God and most New Englanders gave allegience to, and were dominated by, the "New England Way." Such a notion is the legacy of the colonialists' preoccupation with the intricacies of the New England mind; a preoccupation which has blinded him to the reality of a society in ferment, a society where the will of God and the desires of men produced an insoluble dilemma. The historians' obsession with the rise and fall of the New England Way, with the seeming failure of European man to create a wilderness utopia conforming to preconceived notions, with the attempts of New England's literate few to act out the parts of a play written during the Protestant Reformation has blinded him to a society where men struggled for earthly power and authority and material wealth just as they sought God; a society where Puritan and Yankee were one and the same.

NOTES

Preface

[1] Thomas Hooker, A Survey of the Summe of Church Discipline (London, 1648); Hereafter referred to as Hooker, Survey.

[2] Ibid., Introduction.

[3] Curiously, an older generation of historians was convinced that social conflict was the dynamic element in the development of colonial New England. Scholars such as James Truslow Adams and Vernon L. Parrington, writing in the 1920's, viewed the seventeenth century as one of struggle between bigoted, theocratic Puritans and early exponents of democratic liberalism; a struggle culminating in the defeat of the Puritans in the eighteenth century. That view was successfully challenged by a generation of intellectual historians sympathetic to the Puritans and fascinated by their learning, their erudition and their highly sophistocated scheme for the establishment of a Holy Commonwealth. Led by the late Perry Miller this generation focused its interest on the rise, rule and fall of the "New England Way." It speculated on the nature of New England society through the written descriptions and expressed aspirations of the literate few, especially the clergy, and came to the conclusion that it was static, authoritarian, conformist and other-worldly. Only in the later years of the century did this society begin to change and give way to such distinctly "Yankee" virtues as individualism and social and economic mobility. This view, though challenged in recent years, is still common and was recently restated succinctly by Ricard Bushman in his From Puritan to Yankee (Cambridge, Mass., 1967). In the opening paragraph of his preface Professor Bushman states that "sometime between 1690 and 1765 Connecticut Puritans became Yankees. The transition had begun earlier and was far advanced in Boston by 1690, but in Connecticut the institutions inspired by the founders' piety persisted to the end of the seventeenth century. Then after 1690 the close-knit, tightly controlled, homogenous community of the earlier period steadily became more open and heterogeneous. By the eve of the Revolution Connecticut was moving toward a new social order, toward the republican pluralism of the nineteenth century. With the death of old institutions had come the birth of new freedom." (XI)

[4] Bushman, From Puritan to Yankee.

[5] Sumner C. Powell, Puritan Village (Middletown, 1963); Darrett B. Rutman, Winthrop's Boston; Portrait of a Puritan Town (Chapel Hill, 1965).

[6] Kenneth B. Lockridge, Dedham, 1636-1736: The Anatomy of a Puritan Utopia (unpublished Ph.D dissertation, Princeton University, 1965), soon to be published.

[7] This view of Connecticut and Connecticut Valley society is one widely held by colonialists largely because intellectual historians of Puritanism, while focusing their research on Massachusetts Bay, have assumed that the "Puritan" society of Connecticut followed a parallel course. One may see such a view, for example, in Perry Miller's Orthodoxy in Massachusetts, 1630-1650 (Boston, 1933), or in his two volume study of the New England mind.

Moreover, the ideal of a "stable" Connecticut has been given credence by those who, while studying the turbulence of eighteenth century Connecticut, have accepted Professor Miller's analysis of the rise and fall of Puritanism and have assumed that such 18th century events as the Great Awakening and Connecticut's obvious political turmoil came about largely because of the end of "Puritan" domination. Professor Bushman's book, for example, begins on this assumption as does Edwin S. Gaustad's study of The Great Awakening (New York, 1957).

Unfortunately, while assumptions about seventeenth century Connecticut are legion, evidence to support these assumptions is almost non-existent. Some narrow insights may be gained through such works as Mary Jeanne Catherine Jones' Congregational Commonwealth; Connecticut, 1636-1662 (Middletown, Conn., 1968); M. Louise Greene's dated but useful study The Development of Religious Liberty in Connecticut (Cambridge, 1905); Richard Dunn's excellent portrait of the Winthrop family in Puritans and Yankees (Princeton, 1962); and Robert C. Black's The Younger John Winthrop (New York, 1966). In general, however, the state of 17th century Connecticut historiography is best described by Professor Bushman who, in his bibliography, rather painfully notes that the best general study of colonial Connecticut remains Benjamin Trumbull's two volume History of Connecticut, written two hundred years ago. (320)

Prologue

[1] John Woodbridge to Richard Baxter, February 3, 1669, Ms., Connecticut State Library.

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] John Woodbridge to Richard Baxter, March 31, 1671, Connecticut State Library. Both of the Woodbridge letters, together with Baxter's replies, were edited and published by Raymond P. Stearn's in the *New England Quarterly*, X (1937), 557-583. However, the author has elected to rely upon the manuscript letters contained in the Connecticut State Library because the letters published by Professor Stearns, and found among the Baxter Manuscripts in Dr. William's library in England, are somewhat different in content. The Woodbridge letters in Hartford are longer and contain sentences not to be found in the English letters. The author can only assume that the Woodbridge letters contained in the Baxter Ms. are the ones actually received by Baxter while the ones in the Connecticut State Library are probably Woodbridge's first drafts. He makes this assumption because many of Woodbridge's observations in the Connecticut letters, especially concerning Connecticut's ecclesiastical situation, are far more candid than those contained in the Baxter versions. For reasons of his own he evidently had second thoughts about the propriety of some of his statements and decided to tone them down.

[5] This refers to the controversy raging over membership requirements. Woodbridge refers to the evidently common practice of Plymouth's churches in demanding external proof of the presence of grace in the soul, especially a relation of the "time and manner" of conversion. Woodbridge's reference to opening the church doors to those "only visibly holy and uncleane" refers to the belief of Presbyterians and some moderate Congregationalists that an upright life was sufficient grounds for admission.

[6] *Ibid.*

[7] *Ibid.*

[8] Meeting or congregation.

[9] *Ibid.*

[10] *Ibid.*

[11] *Ibid.*

[12] *Ibid.*

[13] *Ibid.*

[14] *Ibid.*

Chapter I

[1] Hooker, *Survey*, Introduction.

[2] See, for example, Charles A. Andrew's *The Beginnings of Connecticut, 1632-1662* (Publications of the Tercentenary Commission of the State of Connecticut [No. 32], New Haven, 1934), 18-20; and a recent reassessment in Edmund S. Morgan's *Visible Saints: The History of a Puritan Idea* (New York, 1963), 105-108.

[3] Robert Stansby to John Wilson, April 17, 1637, "The Winthrop Papers," Massachusetts Historical Society, *Collections*, series 4, VII (1864), 10.

[4] Hooker, *Survey*, Part I, 14-15, Part II, 4-6; See also his *The Unbelievers Preparing for Christ* (London, 1638), six treatises.

[5] The best discussion of this practice and its theological implications is to be found in Norman Pettit's *The Heart Prepared: Grace and Conversion in Puritan Spiritual Life* (New Haven and London, 1966), especially chaps. 4-6, and Morgan's *Visible Saints*.

[6] Samuel Stone, "Against a Relation of Experience," (n.d.) copied in "Joseph Garrish's Notebook, 1697," Ms., Massachusetts Historical Society.

[7] Stansby to Wilson, April 17, 1637, "Winthrop Papers," MHS, *Collections*, series 4, VII, 10.

[8] Hooker, *Survey*, Introduction.

[9] *Ibid.*

[10] *Ibid.*, Parts I and II.

[11] Cotton Mather, in his *Magnalia Christi Americana*, claimed that, in 1652, Stone published a treatise on Congregationalism elaborating on this. Raymond Stearns, in a footnote in his edition of the Woodbridge letters, mentions that Stone wrote a defense of Congregationalism "more or less in the name of the Congregational ministers of New England" in 1652, entitled *A Congregational Church Is a Catholicke Vissible Church. Or An Examination of Mr. Hudson his Vindication Concerning the Integrality of the Catholicke Visible Church*... (London, 1652). The title refers to two anti-Congregational treatises written in 1645 and 1650 by an Englishman, Samuel Hudson. Professor Stearns claims that Stone entered the same controversy between New England Congregationalists and English Presbyterians

which prompted Hooker to publish his Survey. If so, the Stone book has apparently not survived. See Stearns' (ed.), "Correspondence of John Woodbridge, Jr. and Richard Baxter," 565.

[12] Samuel Stone, "Against A Relation of Experience," (n.d.), MHS.

[13] Hooker asked the applicant for evidence of an upright life, then probed the motives of the applicants "good works" and passed judgment on their merit.

[14] Stone, "Against A Relation of Experience."

[15] Although this story will be recounted in detail in chapter two the reader may find the essentials of the dispute in either Benjamin Trumbull's A Compleat History of Connecticut, Civil and Ecclesiastical, from the Emigration of its First Planters, from England, in the year 1630, to the year 1764; and to the close of the Indian Wars, I (New London, 1898), 248-257; or George L. Walker's History of the First Church in Hartford, 1633-1883 (Hartford, 1884), 150-180.

[16] Hooker, Survey, Part II; for Stone's position see especially "Samuel Stone's Remonstrance" of June, 1657, reprinted in Walker, Hartford, 164.

[17] "Records of the Hartford Controversy," Connecticut Historical Society, Collections, II (Hartford, 1870), 74. Hereafter cited as "Records of the Hartford Controversy"; The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut, 1636-1676, 1-3 ed. by J. H. Trumbull; 4-15 ed. by C. J. Hoadly (Hartford, 1850-1890; 15 vols.) I, 290-291; hereafter cited as Connecticut Court Records.

[18] Samuel Stone's petition to the General Court, May 20, 1658, Connecticut Court Reocrds, I, 317.

[19] Hooker, Survey, Part II, 14; Walker, Hartford, 192-193; Joseph B. Felt, The Ecclesiastical History of New England (Boston, 1855-1862; 2 vols.), II, 154; Sylvester Judd, History of Hadley, Massachusetts (Springfield, 1905), 4.

[20] Felt, Ecclesiastical History, II, 2; 38. Stone clearly indicates that the issue was full membership in his letter to Richard Mather of Dorchester, June 6, 1650, and reprinted by Felt.

[21] William B. Sprague, Annals of the American Pulpit (New York, 1857-69, 9 vols.), I,11.

[22] Walker, Hartford, 431.

[23] Windsor, Connecticut, First Congregational Church Records, Connecticut State Library, III, "Creed and Covenant," October 23, 1647; Henry A. Stiles, The History of Ancient Windsor, Connecticut (New York, 1859), 172-173.

[24] Cotton Mather, Magnalia Christi Americana (Hartford, Conn., 1852), 2nd ed., I, 441-442; "Mathew Grant's Old Church Record," in Stiles, Windsor, 846.

[25] Stiles, Windsor, 76, Stiles does not give a date for this change but, given the situation in the church in the 1660's it probably occured at that time.

[26] Petition of William Pitkin and others to the General Court, 1664, in Walker, Hartford, 195-196. John Whiting, born and raised in Hartford, was brought to First Church by Stone in 1660, evidently to placate the remaining dissenters. Stone died in 1663 and, for a time, Whiting was the only minister.

[27] Walker, Hartford, 184-205. The stories of both the Haynes-Whiting controversy and the dissolution of the Windsor church will be related in Chapter II.

[28] John Warham, "On the Form and Matter of a Church," (n.d.), Taylor Ms., Prince Collection, Boston Public Library.

[29] Stiles, Windsor, 172-175.

[30] Bernard Steiner, A History of the Plantation of Menunkatuck and the Original Town of Guilford, Conn. (Baltimore, 1897), 12-15.

[31] Ibid., 22.

[32] Ibid., 35; Ralph D. Smith, History of Guilford, Connecticut from its First Settlement in 1639 (Albany, 1877), 56, 151.

[33] Steiner, Guilford, 35-36, 39.

[34] Ibid., 40; Smith, Guilford, 89.

[35] Steiner, Guilford, 40.

[36] Ibid., 75-76.

[37] John Woodbridge, Jr. to Richard Baxter, March 31, 1671, Connecticut State Library.

[38] Sherman W. Adams and Henry R. Stiles, The History of Ancient Wethersfield, Connecticut (New York, 1904), I, 135-138, 142, 144-145, 148; Connecticut Court Records, I, 87.

[39] Adams and Stiles, Wethersfield, I, 159-163.

[40] Ibid., I, 325; Frances Manwaring Caulkins, History of New London (New London, 1895), 137.

[41] These disputes to be discussed at length in chapter two.

[42] Hooker, Survey, Introduction; Felt, Ecclesiastical History, II, 2.

[43] Felt, Ecclesiastical History, I, 490, 600ff. For a recent reappraisal of the synod and its leaders see Robert F. Scholz, The Reverend Elders: Faith, Fellowship and Politics in the Ministerial Community of Massachusetts Bay, 1630-1710 (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1966), 181-190; see also Henry Wilder Foote, "The Significance and Influence of the Cambridge Platform of 1648," MHS, Proceedings, LXIL (1947-1950),

[44] "Records of the Hartford Controversy," 59-125.

[45] Felt, Ecclesiastical History, II, 189; see also Walker, Hartford, 192.

[46] Felt, Ecclesiastical History, 190. Felt claimed to have seen and compared both sets of proposals but, nonetheless, he drew heavily on Benjamin Trumbull's analysis in his History of Connecticut and Trumbull was in error on several points.

[47] Trumbull, History of Connecticut, I, 253-254. This is, basically, Trumbull's description of the synod's work. The proposals have apparently not survived so I cannot verify his accuracy.

[48] Connecticut Court Records, I, 311.

[49] Ibid., 333.

[50] Walker, Hartford, 195-196.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Connecticut Court Records, I, 438.

[53] Ibid., II, 53-54; Trumbull, History of Connecticut, I, 390.

[54] Felt, Ecclesiastical History, II, 53-54.

[55] Connecticut Court Records, II, 53-54.

[56] Felt, Ecclesiastical History, II, 466-468.

[57] Connecticut Court Records, II, 55.

[58] Walker, Hartford, 203; Connecticut Court Records, II, 109.

[59] Felt, Ecclesiastical History, II, 466-468, especially the selection from the journal of Simon Bradstreet of New London on the Synod of 1667.

Chapter II

[1] John Lockwood, Westfield and its Historic Influences, 1669-1919 (Springfield, 1922), 180-181. The narrative of the founding of the church is based on Taylor's church record, now missing.

[2] Ibid., 111-113.

[3] Ibid., 114-117.

[4] The standard account of the relationship of Covenant theology to Congregational polity is, of course, Perry Miller's The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century (New York, 1939).

[5] Windsor "Creed and Covenant," adopted Oct. 23, 1647, Windsor Church Records, III; see also the chapter on the Dorchester Church in Stiles', Windsor; also Walker, Hartford, 429-431; and Rev. Henry Rowland's brief but illuminating history of the Windsor church (written in 1801) in the Church Records, III.

[6] See p. 27.

[7] Sprague, Annals, I, 11; "Mathew Grant's Old Church Record" in Stiles, Windsor, 844-46.

[8] "Mathew Grant's Old Church Record," in Stiles, Windsor, 846.

[9] See pp. 21-22; although almost no records remain of Hooker's tenure in Hartford there are scattered references to the polity of his church in the early chapters of Walker's, Hartford.

[10] This was Hooker's position in the Survey, III, 4-6, and there is no indication that church practice differed.

[11] Governor George Wyllys to George Wyllys, October 28, 1644, "Wyllys Papers," Connecticut Historical Society, Collections (Hartford, 1924), XXI, 58.

[12] See pp. 31-35.

[13] Caulkins, New London, 111-117. Utilizing records no longer available Caulkin's found no evidence of formal organization until 1670. The earliest ministers, Blynman and Bulkeley, were never ordained by the church. The third minister, Simon Bradstreet, was ordained in 1670. Benjamin Trumbull felt that the church also adopted a covenant in that year but Caulkins was skeptical of that belief.

[14] Ibid., 130-145.

[15] Solomon Stoddard, The Danger of Speedy Degeneracy (Boston, 1705).

[16] Ibid., 1-8.

[17] Lockwood, Westfield, 102-117. The town was organized in 1669, the minister hired in 1671 and the church organized in 1679.

[18] James R. Trumbull, History of Northampton, (Northampton, 1898), I, 25-60.

[19] Northampton, Massachusetts, Rocrds of the First Church of Christ, Forbes Library, Northampton, I, June 18, 1661.

[20] These statistics are based on population estimates in Trumbull and on church membership lists found in volume I of the church records.

[21] Trumbull, Northampton, I, 201; Northampton Church Records, I, January 29, 1668.

[22] Complaint of members of the Wethersfield Church against John Russell, August 17, 1650, Connecticut Archives, Ecclesiastical Affairs, I. Most of the signers were non-members.

[23] Smith, Wethersfield, 159-163; also see chapter I, 17-18.

[24] This evidently referred to a Confession of Faith. See Jonathan Brewster to John Winthrop, Jr., 1657, "Winthrop Papers," MHS, Collections (Boston, 1865), series IV, VII, 84-87.

[25] Ibid., 85-86.

[26] Many, of course, were members of English parishes, which meant that English membership was no longer sufficient grounds for automatic membership in New London.

[27] Brewster to Winthrop, Jr., 1657, "Winthrop Papers," 84-87.

[28] Walker, Hartford, 152; Trumbull, Connecticut, I, 257; also see chap. I.

[29] "Records of the Hartford Controversy," Connecticut Historical Society, Collections (Hartford, 1870), II, 70-71; Hereafter cited as "Records of the Hartford Controversy."

[30] Ibid.

[31] Connecticut Court Records, I, 3.

[32] Testimony of Rev. John Higginson of Guilford before a Council from Massachusetts (n.d., probably 1657), MS., Connecticut Historical Society; "Records of the Hartford Controversy," 94-97.

[33] Bay ministers to the Hartford Church, 1656, "Records of the Hartford Controversy," 59-63; Massachusetts Churches to the Hartford Church, September, 1656, Ibid., 64-68.

[34] Hartford Dissenters to Massachusetts Churches, March, 1657, Ibid., 68-69.

[35] Trumbull, History of Connecticut, I, 248.

[36] John Davenport to John Winthrop, Jr., June 14, 1666, Isabel M. Calder (ed.), The Letters of John Davenport (New Haven, 1937), p. 263.

[37] This was a belief shared by many other Valley ministers as well. See John Higginson's Testimony and Hartford Dissenters to John Davenport and Gov. Eaton, December, 1657, "Records of Hartford Controversy," 83, 94-95.

[38] Samuel Stone to the Hartford Church, May, 1657, "Records of Hartford Controversy," 70-71.

[39] Samuel Stone to the Hartford Church, June, 1657, *Ibid.*, 73-75; Walker, *Hartford*, 164.

[40] *Ibid.*, August 2, 1657, 75-76.

[41] *Connecticut Court Records*, I, 311.

[42] *Ibid.*, 317.

[43] Hartford Dissenters to Gov. Eaton and John Davenport, Dec., 1657; "Records of the Hartford Controversy," 82-86.

[44] Trumbull, *History of Connecticut*, I, 251.

[45] Samuel Stone to the General Court, March 11, 1658, "Wyllys Papers," CHS, *Collections*, XXI, 128; *Connecticut Court Records*, I, 333.

[46] Trumbull, *History of Connecticut*, I, 254.

[47] Connecticut General Court to Churches of Boston, Cambridge, and Roxbury, Aug. 26, 1658, "Records of the Hartford Controversy," 102; Petition of Samuel Stone to the General Court, May 20, 1658, *Connecticut Court Records*, I, 317.

[48] Trumbull, *History of Connecticut*, I, 256-257.

[49] Decision of the Council, Oct. 7, 1659, "Records of the Hartford Controversy," 112-125.

[50] Trumbull, *History of Connecticut*, I, 256-257.

[51] *Connecticut Court Records*, I, 343.

[52] Trumbull, *History of Connecticut*, I, 248.

[53] Walker, *Hartford*, 182-183.

[54] John Davenport to John Winthrop, Jr., June 14, 1666, Calder, (ed.), *Davenport Letters*, 263.

[55] Walker, *Hartford*, 183-185.

[56] This was their second attempt to join First Church. They had also unsuccessfully sought admission to the Windsor Church (see pp. 45-47). See also the petition of William Pitkin and others to the General Court, 1664, Walker, *Hartford*, 195-196.

[57] The Notebook of the Rev. Samuel Whiting of Windham, Connecticut, 1666, Ms., Connecticut State Library; Walker, *Hartford*, 200.

[58] Felt, Ecclesiastical History, II, 467; Walker Hartford, 200-202.

[59] Connecticut Court Records, II, 109.

[60] Ibid., II, 120.

[61] Walker, Hartford, 205-208; Trumbull, Connecticut, I, 392; Hartford First Church, Historical Catalogue of the First Church in Hartford, 1633-1885, (Hartford, 1885), 17; Hereafter cited as Hartford Catalogue.

[62] Smith, Wethersfield, I, 160-163; Adams and Stiles, Ancient Wethersfield, I, 322-324.

[63] Trumbull, Connecticut, I, 393.

[64] See the Petition of Dissenters to the Stratford Church, Feb. 9, 1665, also the church's reply, April 16, 1666, Connecticut Archives, Ecclesiastical, I.

[65] Stratford Town Vote, Dec. 18, 1666, Ibid.,

[66] See documents 25 to 34, November 11, 1668 to September 10, 1669, Connecticut Archives, Ecclesiastical, I; Trumbull, Connecticut, I, 393; see also Woodbury, Connecticut, Records of the First Congregational Church, Connecticut State Library, I, June 7, 1678. The early records of Stratford Second Church are contained in the first volume of the Woodbury records.

[67] Connecticut Historical Society, Some Early Records and Documents Relating to the Town of Windsor, Connecticut, 1679-1703, (Hartford, 1930), 13. This collection also includes "Mathew Grant's Old Church Record from which this selection is taken.

[68] "Henry Rowlandson's History of the Windsor Church, 1801," Windsor Church Records, III; Connecticut Court Records, II, 73-74.

[69] Trumbull, Connecticut, I, 390.

[70] Windsor Dissenters to the General Court, Oct., 1668, "Wyllys Papers," CHS, Collections, XXI, 183; Stiles, Windsor, 176.

[71] Stiles, Windsor, 179; Davenport to John Winthrop, Jr., June 14, 1666, Davenport Letters, 263.

[72] Connecticut Court Records, II, 99, 114, 124; Stiles, Windsor, 179.

[73] Trumbull, *Connecticut*, I, 259; *Connecticut Court Records*, I, 361.

[74] *Connecticut Court Records*, II, 240.

[75] Caulkins, *New London*, 131-139.

Chapter III

[1] *Connecticut Court Records*, II, 109.

[2] See Hartford, Connecticut, Records of the First Congregational Church, Connecticut State Library, X.

[3] This analysis of ministerial attitudes is a composite of published writings of the 1670's and 1680's and, especially, the conclusions of the Synod of 1676.

[4] The situation in Connecticut and the Connecticut Valley in the 1670's is masterfully recounted in Douglas Leach's *Flintlock and Tomahawk; New England in King Phillip's War* (New York, 1958), His analysis of the war and its effects, both physical and psychological, on the frontier settlements is unmatched. Earlier "disasters" in the Valley such as drought, disease, and famine are chronicled in the *Court Records*, II.

[5] Much has been written by scholars about the "Jeremiads" of late seventeenth century New England but the standard account remains Perry Miller's *New England Mind from Colony to Province* (Cambridge, 1953), especially chapter II. Miller, however, largely confines his analysis to Massachusetts, as have most subsequent students of the phenomenon. No adequate study of the "Jeremiad" exists for Connecticut or the Connecticut Valley.

[6] James Fitch, *An Holy Connexion, Or a True Agreement between Jehovahs Being a Wall of Fire to his People, and the Glory in the Midst Thereof*. (Cambridge, 1674). Apparently the first "Jeremiad" by a Connecticut or Connecticut Valley minister was Eleazer Mather's *A Serious Exhortation to the Present and Succeeding Generation in New England* (Cambridge, 1671), published posthumously by Increase Mather. However, the "Jeremiad" appeared in Massachusetts a decade earlier. See Robert F. Scholz, The Reverend Elders; Faith, Fellowship and Politics in the Ministerial Community of Massachusetts Bay, 1630-1710 (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1966), chapter V.

[7] Fitch, *Jehovah a Wall of Fire*, 7, 16.

[8] James Fitch, An Explanation of the Solemn Advice, Recommended by the Council in Connecticut Colony, to the Inhabitants in that Jurisdiction resolving the Reformation of those Evils, which have been the Procuring Cause of the late Judgments upon New England (Boston, 1683), a 2. Massachusetts held its own "Reforming Synod" in 1679.

[9] Ibid., 4.

[10] Ibid., 13.

[11] The clergy's analysis of the ills of the country is to be found in Fitch, 8-38.

[12] The "reforming covenant" has been the cause of some confusion among scholars studying the records of some churches. Often they have missed the specific purposes of these agreements and have assumed that signers were becoming either half-way or full members of the churches. This has caused some confusion as to the number of persons joining the churches as well as to the nature of membership practices. In general, however, these covenants bore no relationship to membership, either full or half-way. As an example the reader is directed to the Hartford "covenant" of 1695 which has been called a "Half-Way" Covenant. In fact, this was a reforming covenant directed specifically toward the young people of the church. Signing the document had no effect on membership status.

[13] Fitch, An Explanation of the Solemn Advice, 69-71. Discrimination against males seems to have been indicative of the fact that, during this period, Valley churches were becoming increasingly dominated by women. Men were simply not joining the churches in any capacity at the same rate as women. The Norwich covenant seems to have been an attempt to remedy the situation. It also illustrates a general feeling that men were much more likely to succumb to the "evils" of the time. This will be discussed at greater length in Chapter VI.

[14] Hartford Catalogue, 22. Of the signers only seventeen had joined the church by 1707, excluding a few who were already members in 1695.

[15] John Whiting, The Way of Israels Welfare (Boston, 1686), 27.

[16] This occurred in both the Windsor and Hartford disputes.

[17] Trumbull, Connecticut, III, 64-65.

[18] *Ibid.*, 65.

[19] The preceding discussion is based, to a large extent, on Robert Scholz's excellent analysis of ecclesiastical developments in Massachusetts in the 1660's and 1670's in The Reverend Elders, Chapter V, expecially pp. 182-206. While there are many competent treatments of the period Professor Scholz's research is unique in that he does not attempt to interpret the ministerial mind of Massachusetts or the familiar events of Bay ecclesiastical history solely in terms of the rise, reign, and fall of the orthodoxy of the "New England Way." Rather, he discusses the *evolution* of the ministerial community in terms of their futile attempts to resolve certain basic intellectual and institutional problems of Federal theory and Congregational Polity and sees the decline of "Puritanism" as the failure to find that agreement. His comments on the 1660's are particularly revealing for he shows the Massachusetts clergy suffering from problems similar to those of their Connecticut brethren; unresolved ecclesiastical differences which resulted in a public rift in the ministerial community after the Half-Way Synod (1662), the beginnings of contention and schism among the brethren over those issues, an attack on clerical authority, and the subsequent decline of that authority.

[20] This is a summary of Stoddard's position as outlined in *The Doctrine of Instituted Churches* (London, 1700). Mather's reference to "Pope" Stoddard is contained in his introduction to *The Order of the Gospel* (Boston, 1700).

[21] Mather's early fear of Stoddard is discussed in Perry Miller's, *New England Mind from Colony to Province*, 226-248.

[22] Williston Walker, *The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism* (2nd ed., Boston, 1960), 414-415; Miller, *Colony to Province*, 33-39. There were others, as well, who blamed the elders for declension. In 1670, a special committee of the Massachusetts General Court came to exactly that conclusion, Scholz, The Reverend Elders, 200.

[23] Walker, *Creeds and Platforms*, 415.

[24] *Ibid.*, 280.

[25] Solomon Stoddard, *An Appeal to the Learned*, (Boston, 1709), 93-94.

[26] *Ibid.*

[27] Walker, Creeds and Platforms, 419.

[28] Stoddard, Appeal to the Learned, 93-94.

[29] Walker, Creeds and Platforms, 433.

[30] Ibid., 434.

[31] Ibid., 418.

[32] Samuel Wakeman, Sound Repentance. The Right Way to Escape Deserved Ruine (Boston, 1685).

[33] Ibid., 15.

[34] Ibid., 22.

[35] Ibid., 23.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid., 32.

[38] Ibid., 31.

[39] Whiting, Way of Israel's Welfare, 22.

[40] It is not the author's intent to present an analysis of the accuracy of the clergy's list of the country's woes yet it is his feeling, on the basis of admittedly scanty research, that the topic is of extreme importance to our understanding of New England society in the late seventeenth century. On the question of declining church membership the author feels the clergy's argument basically right, if somewhat confusing. The Northampton church, for example, while under the tutelage of Solomon Stoddard, grew at a steady rate and Stoddard's ability to draw new members to the fold was widely hailed. Yet, if one makes a simple comparison of population estimates contained in Trumbull's Northampton with membership figures in volume III of the church records, it is discovered that while approximately one of every two and one-half Northampton adults were church members in 1670 the figure falls to one of every four by 1700. Similar situations could be cited in other communities; total membership rose while the proportion of members to non-members fell. Apparently, then, the clergy referred to a decline relative to total population rather than to an actual decline in the number of members. If so, one of our basic assumptions about these churches in the late seventeenth century--that they were forced by declining membership to adopt "innovations" in polity which destroyed the

intentions of the founders--might be in error.

Another widely-held assumption about the "decline" of New England Puritanism is that the last decades of the seventeenth century witnessed a breakdown of morality and a general rise in licentiousness. This fact, which is also part of the ministerial lament, is used as evidence that the churches, as they declined in membership lost the control over the manners, mores, and morals of the people they had exercised in the first generation. Yet, a cursory examination of some of the printed legal records available to the student of the Connecticut Valley does not reveal such a moral collapse. Instead, they suggest that immorality was a problem faced throughout the century and that the number of offenses increased steadily but at a rate consistent with a growing population. This is the pattern, for example, demonstrated by the record of magistrate John Pynchon's County Court in Springfield, Mass. His record reveals that the only type of legal action to increase radically involved actions for non-payment of debts, thus indicating hard times not debauchery. (Joseph H. Smith, /ed./ *Colonial Justice in Western Massachusetts, 1639-1702; The Pynchon Court Record* (Cambridge, 1961). The same may be said for New London, Connecticut. Francis Caulkins, the town historian, poured over the legal records of the community then concluded that New London was akin to Sodom and Gomorrah in the last years of the 17th century. She found, she argued, numerous cases of drunkenness, moral offenses such as evil-speaking, blasphemy, disorderly conduct, and sexual crimes, to name a few. Yet she found no marked increase in any particular kind of offense, admitted that earlier records were almost non-existent, and was unable to state that the increase in cases was anything more than a reflection of a yearly increase in population (*New London*, 246-253).

[41] Whiting, *Way of Israel's Welfare*, 30.

[42] *Ibid.*, 34.

[43] Gurdon Saltonstall, *A Sermon Preached before the General Assembly* (Boston, 1697), 53.

[44] *Ibid.*, 54.

[45] *Ibid.*

[46] *Ibid.*, 55.

[47] *Ibid.*, 74-76.

[48] Richard Bushman's Puritan to Yankee ably demonstrates how land speculation and land hunger affected political and legal affairs in Connecticut in the 1680's and 90's and led to corruption and factionalism in government and in the courts. Saltonstall, Bushman points out, lashed out at this situation in his sermon and was particularly vitriolic in his attack on Capt. John Fitch of Norwich who had used his office as a magistrate and judge in New London County to influence decisions on disputed titles while one of the most powerful political figures in the colony; Bushman, 87-95.

[49] Connecticut Court Records, III, 79-82; Trumbull, Connecticut, II, 399.

Chapter IV

[1] The literature on Stoddard is not extensive, despite the feeling of most colonialists that he was a most important personage to his time. No biography exists, nor is one likely to be written given the paucity of material pertaining to his life and work. However, several short treatments of the Northampton divine merit consideration. The oldest is W. Bement's "Stoddardeanism," New Englander, IV (1846), 350-355. Among modern accounts the most extensive is Perry Miller's "Solomon Stoddard, 1643-1729," Harvard Theological Review, XXXIV (October, 1941), 377-420. The interested reader is advised to compare this article with Professor Miller's treatment of Stoddard in The New England Mind from Colony to Province for, to a certain extent, Miller changed his approach to Stoddard in the time between the publication of the two pieces. Finally, the reader is urged to read an excellent recent treatment of Stoddard's evangelicalism by Thomas A. Schafer, entitled "Solomon Stoddard and the Theology of the Revival," in Stuart C. Henry (ed.), A Miscellany of American Christianity; Essays in Honor of H. Shelton Smith (Durham, North Carolina, 1963), 328-361.

For numerous reasons Stoddard remains an enigma to students of American colonial history. This author feels that much of the difficulty lies in the fact that Stoddard has never been studied in the context of the ecclesiastical history of his own region, the Connecticut Valley, and that this has blinded scholars to some fairly obvious reasons as to how and why he could have been both a Presbyterian in matters of church polity and an evangelical theologian. Also, ignorance of Valley history has led students to over-estimate Stoddard's importance to colonial history for they have assumed that his views commanded a much larger following among clergy and laity than they actually did.

[2] See Benjamin Colman, Timothy Woodbridge, and Simon Bradstreet, The Gospel Order Revived (New York, 1700) for a Presbyterian view of Stoddard. Gurdon Saltonstall, who became governor of Connecticut in 1707, sympathized with Stoddard's ideas but his position as a political figure minimized his influence among the Connecticut clergy. The same was true of Gershom Bulkeley, a leading Presbyterian of earlier years. In the late seventeenth century Bulkeley left the ministry for medical practice and ceased to be influential among Valley Presbyterians.

[3] Unless otherwise noted the facts of Stoddard's life are taken from James R. Trumbull's History of Northampton, I.

[4] For the role of the Bay clergy, especially Norton, in the political struggle in Massachusetts after the Restoration see my article "Colony or Commonwealth: Massachusetts Bay, 1661-1666," William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd series., XXIV (January, 1967), 88-107; see also the Petition of Boston Non-Freemen to the Massachusetts General Court, May 4, 1665, Massachusetts Archives, CVI.

[5] "Solomon Stoddard's Commonplace Book," microfilm copy, Widener Library, Harvard University. The original copy was in the possession of the library of the Union Theological Seminary, New York, but has been lost.

[6] See pp. 128-138.

[7] Edward Taylor to Solomon Stoddard, Feb. 13, 1687, "Edward Taylor's Commonplace Book," Massachusetts Historical Society.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Solomon Stoddard to Edward Taylor, June 4, 1688, Ibid.

[10] (Northampton, 1804), 4th ed.

[11] Miller, "Solomon Stoddard," Harvard Theological Review, 281. Stoddard made several statements in The Safety of Appearing which would not have endeared him to Mather: (a. that it was impossible for a man to know the condition of another's soul; (b. that all men might be saved; (c. that the ordinances, especially communion, might have been intended for persons not considered as numbering among the "saints."

[12] Westfield to Northampton, July 3, 1673, Taylor's Commonplace Book. So far as this author can discern

this practice was quite common. To guarantee permanence and stability a prospective church had to have among its potential members a certain percentage of persons of known social and economic stature and godliness before other churches would consent to its formation. If a community did not have enough of such men it obviously had the right to contact other churches and request that those men be provided, even to the point of asking for specific individuals. It is also obvious that such men were then expected to oblige. The author has been unable to find any modern analysis or explanation of this practice, although it has obvious sociological implications in understanding the origin and growth of churches and towns in seventeenth century New England.

[13] Northampton to Westfield, July 29, 1673, Taylor's Commonplace Book.

[14] Westfield to Northampton, August 21, 1673, Ibid.

[15] Edward Taylor, "A Particular church is God's House," Taylor Ms., Prince Collection, Boston Public Library.

[16] The fourth proposition stated that children of visible believers "are not to be admitted into full communion merely because they are and continue members, without such further qualifications as the Word of God requireth thereunto" ("Mather Papers," MHS, Collections, Fourth series, VIII [1868], fn., 84). Russell was referring to a practice begun in Stoddard's church at the time of his ordination; namely, that of admitting to full communion all children of the church who, upon reaching their majority, showed evidence of living "upright" lives. (Northampton Church Reoords, I, Nov. 11, 1672). This was not a new doctrine. It was upheld by some Valley "Presbyterians" in the 1650's and 1660's and was debated at the synod of Boston in 1662. I have found other churches adopting the practice but none as early as Northampton.

[17] John Russell to Increase Mather, March 28, 1681, "Mather Papers," Massachusetts Historical Society, Collections, 4th series, VIII (1868), 83-84.

[18] Trumbull, Northampton, I, 70-105, 214-215.

[19] This was stated by the church as its reason for a "reformation," Northampton Church Records, I, Jan. 29, and Feb. 16, 1668.

[20] Perry Miller and others have erroneously attributed this innovation to Stoddard: Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid., February 22, 1668-69.

[23] Ibid.

[24] The question may be raised as to why a Congregational church would hire a man whose views were otherwise. It was Professor Miller's belief that Stoddard's ideas were formulated after his arrival at Northampton and as a direct result of his experience as a pastor in a frontier community (see "Solomon Stoddard," Harvard Theological Review). More than likely, however, many of Stoddard's notions were already formulated by the time of his arrival in Northhampton. More than likely, also, the church knew of his beliefs and took him anyway for it was a common practice in the Valley. Ministers were scarce and churches usually took the best man they could find, regardless of his persuasion. New London did just that in 1661, taking Gershom Buckeley even though they knew him to be a Presbyterian.

[25] Northampton Church Records, I, November 5, 1672.

[26] In his 1687 correspondence with Stoddard, Edward Taylor mentions that Stoddard had had little success convincing his flock of the wisdom of his position, Taylor's Commonplace Book.

[27] Edward Taylor's Commonplace Book, entry dated "1690."

[28] Northampton Church Records, I, Dec. 9, 1714.

[29] See Increase Mather's attack upon Stoddard and other Presbyterian ministers at a synod held in Boston, July 4, 1700, in "The Diary of Cotton Mather," MHS, Collections, 7th series, VII, 384-388.

[30] Taylor to Stoddard, Feb. 13, 1687-88; Taylor's Commonplace Book.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Stoddard to Taylor, June 4, 1688, Ibid.

[33] Solomon Stoddard, An Examination of the Power of the Fraternity (Boston, 1718), 1-2.

[34] Cotton Mather, Magnalia Christi Americana, I, 385-387; see also Increase's speech to the synod in Boston on July 4, 1700, in Cotton's "Diary," MHS, Collections, 7th series, VII, 384-388.

[35] London, 1700.

[36] Solomon Stoddard, *The Doctrine of the Instituted Churches* (London, 1700), 1-5, 22, 25-28; see also Increase Mather's analysis of Stoddard's position in his introduction to John Quick's, *The Young Man's Claim* (Boston, 1700).

[37] In his chapter on Stoddard in *The New England Mind from Colony to Province* Professor Miller was correct in arguing that Stoddard differed from most New England divines in that his God was more Old Testament than New. However, Miller was wrong in asserting that Stoddard upheld a capricious, irrational God. His God was perhaps more terrible than most of his colleague's conceptions, yet he was still bound by the "law" (*Safety of Appearing*, 205) and, though above it, he agreed to abide by it. (the binding covenant of Grace and Christ's Atonement). If anything, Stoddard's notion of God was the most rational put forward by any New England divine. God's "plan" for man was, Stoddard believed, perfectly clear and understandable and represented an unbroken continuum from creation to the present. To Stoddard, though God was all-powerful, he acted rationally and man could easily interpret his plan as it was revealed in history. That was Stoddard's message in both the *Safety of Appearing and the Doctrine of the Instituted Churches*.

[38] Stoddard, *Doctrine of the Instituted Churches*, 5-6, 18-19, 22.

[39] *Ibid.*, 7-8, 25-28.

[40] *Ibid.*, 29-32.

[41] *Ibid.*, 9.

[42] *Ibid.*, 12, 18-20.

[43] Cotton's Magnalia (1702) was an oblique attack on Presbyterian innovations, including Stoddard's. In 1698 Cotton published one of its chapters, the life of Rev. John Mitchell, with a long preface by Increase. Cotton's diary contains numerous references to Stoddard in the 1690's as well as disparaging remarks about Presbyterians from himself and from brother Increase. The "Diary" also reveals numerous attempts by Increase and Cotton to organize ministerial opposition to Presbyterian innovators. (In 1697, for example, several Boston area ministers issued a public denunciation of certain Presbyterian views.) See a copy of the Pronouncement of an Assembly of Ministers at Boston, May, 1697,

Wethersfield, Conn. Church Records, I. Of course, the culmination of their activity was Increase's Order of the Gospel (1700) and his response to Stoddard's Instituted Churches in the introduction to Quick's Young Man's Claim (1700). Not until the latter volume did either Cotton or Increase make any attempt to distinguish Stoddard from other Presbyterians.

[44] Cotton Mather, Magnalia, I, 436-437.

[45] For example, Thomas Parker, first minister of Newbury, Mass. was a Presbyterian and constantly at odds with Bay Congregationalists, yet Mather could not bring himself to admit either his views or his recalcitrance. Parker possessed a "largeness in his principles about church-government," Mather wrote (483), and as to his differences with the majority of his colleagues, "the alienation between them was not so great as that between Theodus and Pollinis." (same) With that settled Mather was able to concentrate on Parker's "diligence," "charity" and the "strains" of his "immoderate studies" which brought a "miserable defluxion of rheum upon his eyes." (482)

[46] This is, of course, a rather liberal paraphrasing of Mather's theme in the Magnalia. Some reference to it is to be found in nearly every "life" of a New England Clergyman, particularly those considered most eminent. It is, perhaps, most obvious in the Fifth Book, "Acts and Monuments," which is a general historical outline of the "Faith and Order" and analyzes the decisions of the major synods (II, 177-338). See also Perry Miller's comments on the implications of the Magnalia in "Solomon Stoddard," 301-302.

Chapter V

[1] For the interested reader the major works of the Stoddard-Mather controversy are listed in Perry Miller's "Solomon Stoddard," Harvard Theological Review, 303-304. Professor Miller's article on Stoddard and his chapter in The New England Mind from Colony to Province entitled "Contention" are the standard treatments of the debate.

[2] John Wise, A Vindication of the Government of New England Churches (Boston, 1717).

[3] Benjamin Colman, Simon Bradstreet, and Timothy Woodbridge, Gospel Order Revived (New York, 1700). This pamphlet appeared anonymously and, hence, some disagreement exists as to its exact authorship. In

general it is felt that Colman wrote most or all of it and that Simon Bradstreet of Charlestown was a co-author. However, the name of the third contributor is in some doubt. That it was a Woodbridge is generally conceded, but whether it was Timothy of Hartford or his nephew John of West Springfield is debatable. For several reasons this author favors Timothy, but, regardless of authorship, the treatise is still important because it claims to be a defense of New England Presbyterianism.

[4] Increase Mather, The Order of the Gospel (Boston, 1700).

[5] John Quick, The Young Man's Claim unto the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, 2nd ed. (Boston, 1700), with an introduction, "A Defence of Evangelical Churches," by Increase and Cotton Mather.

[6] Although no Valley minister except Woodbridge published his views during the debate a number expressed themselves in sermons to their congregations or in treatises which, for one reason or another, never appeared in print. In the northern portion of the Valley, for example, Edward Taylor of Westfield was continually preaching and writing poetry denouncing Stoddard. Some of his sermons eventually appeared in print, several with Mather's Order of the Gospel. In the Hartford area Samuel Mather of Windsor wrote a long treatise denouncing Stoddard. The manuscript, untitled and undated, is in the Connecticut Historical Society. Elsewhere in Connecticut Gurdon Saltonstall of New London labored on Stoddard's behalf, although none of his writings were published. The Massachusetts Historical Society possesses a pro-Stoddard Ms. sermon given before the New London Church in 1703.

[7] There is considerable historical debate as to whether the Brattle Street Church (1698) was intended to be a Presbyterian or an Anglican church or neither. Most scholars have argued for Anglicanism (for example, see Shipton, /ed./, Sibley's Harvard Graduates /Cambridge, 1933/, 122-123. Perry Miller in volume II of the New England Mind does not opt for either label. Instead he sees the church as a kind of conspiracy of wealthy Boston merchants--of those who could no longer tolerate the stultifying qualities of the New England "Mind"--against the protectors of "orthodoxy," the Mathers. In this Miller believed that the founders of Brattle Street (including Colman) were in league with Stoddard and were the representative vanguard of a "Yankee" society which recognized that the "New England Way" no longer conformed to the demands of life in the

bristling, acquisitive society to be found in early 18th century New England. (See Miller, *New England Mind from Colony to Province*, 240-260). Miller assumed, also, that the merchant-founders of the Brattle Street church, like Thomas Brattle, were behind Colman's *Gospel Order Revived*. However, the Ms. Colman Papers in the Massachusetts Historical Society reveal that minister and people were at odds over the intended nature of the church. For example, several letters written to Colman in England by leaders of the movement to form a church show clearly that they envisioned an Anglican church (see, for example, J. Nelson to Colman, May 20, 1699, Colman Papers, I). However, some of Colman's later letters to various persons reveal that he intended to preside over a Presbyterian church and was ultimately frustrated by the "Congregationalism" of the land (see Colman to Robert Wodrow, Dec. 9, 1717, MHS, *Proceedings*, LXXXII [Jan.-Dec. 1965], 107). This suggests, then, that *Gospel Order Revived* was a purely ministerial undertaking void of the conspiratorial aspects suggested by Professor Miller. It also suggests why the authors of *Gospel Order Revived*, while ostensibly defending the "innovations" of the Brattle church, turned the treatise into a general defense of New England Presbyterianism. Moreover, it also explains why they took such pains to refute Stoddard, something not at all necessary if they merely intended to defend the Brattle Street Church against Mather.

[8] Mather, *Order of the Gospel*, 8. *The Heads of Agreement* (1691) was the product of two years of meetings between English Congregationalists and Presbyterians after the Toleration Act (1689). Increase Mather, in England the whole time, played a vital role in formulating the document and thus emerged as the great champion of compromise. But English Presbyterians were quite different from their Scotch colleagues who were much more firmly wedded to synodical government and it was the Scottish variety which found the most favor among New England clergy. Hence, Mather tried to discredit New England's Presbyterians as "false" Presbyterians because they would not or could not subscribe to the doctrine contained in the *Heads of Agreement* (in *Order of the Gospel*, also see Miller, *New England Mind from Colony to Province*, 216-225).

[9] *Ibid.*, 5.

[10] *Ibid.*, 5-7.

[11] *Ibid.*

[12] *Ibid.*, 5-15.

[13] Mather listed the following as "dangerous" opinions then circulating: (a. that churches not enquire into the regeneration of applicants; (c. particular church covenants needless and unscriptural; (d. non-members may vote in the selection of a minister; (e. all professing Christians have a right to baptism; (f. brethren have no voice in ecclesiastical councils; (g. the ministers call stems from the imposition of "hands" rather than from election by the members; (h. persons may be installed as ministers without the consent of neighboring churches, Order of the Gospel, 8.

[14] Ibid., 22.

[15] Ibid., 29.

[16] Ibid., 8.

[17] 1st ed., London, 1691.

[18] Increase and Cotton Mather's "Defence of Evangelical Churches," introduction to Quick's Young Man's Claim, 9-11, hereafter cited as Mather, "Defence of Evangelical Churches," In this introduction, the majority of which appears to have been written by Increase, he argues that his Order of the Gospel could easily be construed as an answer to Stoddard and that he meant it as such. Yet, it seems apparent from his line of argument in his "Defense" that much of Stoddard took him by surprise. Why else would he have appended a sixty-two page treatise if he had said all that was necessary in Order of the Gospel.

[19] Mather, "Defence of Evangelical Churches," 10.

[20] Ibid., 24.

[21] Ibid., 27.

[22] An obsolete word meaning either false or deceiving.

[23] Mather, "Defense of Evangelical Churches," 26.

[24] Ibid., 43-50, 59-60.

[25] The doctrine of the "seals" was the notion that the Lord's Supper was a commemoration or "seal" of the Covenant of Grace between God and man. Therefore, it was argued that admission to the Supper ought to be restricted to known regenerates.

[26] Mather hints that Samuel Rutherford once flirted with the notion of "converting" ordinances.

[27] Mather, "Defense of Evangelical Churches," 43-46.

[28] Ibid., 31.

[29] Ibid., 30.

[30] Appendix to Quick, Young Man's Claim.

[31] The facts of Timothy Woodbridge's life are from John Langdon Sibley, (ed.), Biographical Sketches of Graduates of Harvard University (Cambridge, 1881), II, 464-470.

[32] Clifford K. Shipton (ed.), Sibley's Harvard Graduates (Cambridge, 1933), IV, 120-123.

[33] Ibid., 154-158.

[34] Colman, et al., Gospel Order Revived, 39.

[35] Mather, "Defense of Evangelical Churches," 63.

[36] Colman, et al., Gospel Order Revived, 39.

[37] Ibid., ii.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid., iii.

[40] Ibid., iv.

[41] Ibid., vi.

[42] The preceding analysis is taken from the introduction to Gospel Order Revived, especially pp. v-viii.

[43] Ibid., 11.

[44] Ibid., 7.

[45] Ibid., 12.

[46] Ibid., 21.

[47] Ibid., 18-27.

[48] Scholz, The Reverend Elders, 223-224.

[49] The failure of the "Proposals" is discussed at various points in Miller, New England Mind from Colony to Province; see especially pp. 261-266.

[50] See Northampton Church Records, I, Dec. 9, 1714; The church dispute referred to took place in Enfield and is discussed on pp. 249-251.

[51] Walker, Creeds and Platforms, 498.

[52] Connecticut Court Records, V, 51.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Walker, Creeds and Platforms, 501-502. Walker's discussion of the synod and the events surrounding the Platform remains the best published account.

[55] Ibid., 457.

[56] Ibid.

[57] This quote is taken from the Ezra Stiles Ms. (now in the Yale University Library), Walker, Creeds and Platforms, 501.

[58] The text of the Platform is published in Walker, 495-516.

[59] Ibid., 87; Connecticut Court Records, V, 5, 87.

[60] Ibid.

[61] There seems little doubt that, for a while at least, the "associations" and the yearly synod acted as they were supposed to act. The minister's debated common problems in their association meetings, presented proposals to the yearly meeting which were, in turn, presented to the Connecticut Assembly for legal action. There is little solid evidence of the truth of this except that a flood of "reforming" legislation poured out of the Assembly between 1708 and 1715. That this was the product of a highly organized ministerial lobby can only be surmised. In one instance, however, that of minister's salaries, their influence was obvious. For years the clergy had complained bitterly of how it was being victimized by congregations who used the power of the purse to demand conformity of thought and action from errant clergymen. Finally, in May, 1708, shortly before the Platform was ratified, the Court specified that, if a minister desired, his salary could be included in the "countrie rate" and be collected by the constable, Connecticut Court Records, V, 50. For other examples of reforming legislation, much of it designed to protect the minister's position and preserve his authority, see volumes V and VI of the Court Records; See also, Walker, Creeds and Platforms, 469.

[62] Walker, Creeds and Platforms, 509; Stratford, Connecticut, Records of the First Congregational Church, Connecticut State Library, I, 5-8.

[63] M. Louise Greene, The Development of Religious Liberty in Connecticut (Boston, 1905), 147-152; Walker, Creeds and Platforms, 508-512.

[64] J. M. Bumsted, "Revivalism and Separatism in New England; The First Society of Norwich, Connecticut, as a Case Study," William and Mary Quarterly, Third series, XXIV (October, 1967), 591-594.

Chapter VI

[1] So far as it is possible to ascertain from admittedly slim evidence, Stoddard's arguments, except where common to all Presbyterians, were not incorporated into any of the county plans submitted for consideration by the synod.

[2] William Brattle to ? , 1700, Curwin Papers, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester.

[3] Northampton Church Records, I, Dec. 9, 1714.

[4] Ibid. Of these men William Williams of Hatfield is most often linked to Stoddard. The author cannot refute this tie, yet cannot support it either. Williams extant writings--a few sermons and a few letters--give no hint of sympathy for Stoddard's position. They suggest only that he was a Presbyterian. See especially his Honor of Christ (Boston, 1728) and The Danger of not Reforming Known Evils (Boston, 1707). In the latter treatise he enunciated his conception of the nature of the Lord's Supper. He did not see it as a "converting" ordinance.

[5] Hampshire Association to the Enfield Church, 1715, Forbes Library, Northampton.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Northampton Church Records, I, Dec. 9, 1714.

[8] Hampshire Association to the Enfield Church, August 20, 1718, Gratz Collection, "American Colonial Clergy," Box 25, Pennsylvania Historical Society, Philadelphia.

[9] See pp. 239-240.

[10] Norwich, Connecticut, Records of the First Congregational Church, Connecticut State Library, II, March 19, 1716/7.

[11] Solomon Stoddard, An Examination of the Power of the Fraternity (Boston, 1718), 1.

[12] Ibid., 2.

[13] Ibid., 11.

[14] Ibid., 7, 14-15.

[15] Ibid., 16.

[16] In John Woodbridge, Jr's. letter to Richard Baxter in 1671 two Valley churches were mentioned as being Presbyterian; that is, under the rule of the eldership. My own search of available church records reveals that, in 1708, no Valley church could be called "Presbyterian" even though the number of Presbyterians among the clergy had greatly increased over 1671.

[17] See Woodbridge to Baxter, March, 1671, Connecticut State Library. "There are only two towns wherein all of the Christian inhabitants are under the care, Inspection and government of the Eldership, viz. Wethersfield."

[18] Adams and Stiles, Wethersfield, I, 324.

[19] Ibid., I, 330-332.

[20] Wethersfield, Connecticut, Records of the First Congregational Church, 1697-1733, Connecticut State Library, II.

[21] Ibid., II, Jan. 2, 1703.

[22] See pp. 95-97.

[23] Trumbull, Connecticut, I, 392.

[24] Ibid., First and Second Churches were reunited in 1680.

[25] Hartford, Connecticut, Records of the First Congregational Church, Connecticut State Library, X.

[26] Hartford Church Records, X, May 10, July 10, 1703.

[27] A meaningless practice to Presbyterians as stated by Woodbridge himself in Gospel Order Revived.

[28] Hartford Church Records, X, Jan. 13, 1720.

[29] Wethersfield Church Records, II, Jan. 2, 1703; See also section on Samuel Stone on pp. 21-28.

[30] See pp. 101-104.

[31] Stiles, Windsor, 163-164.

[32] Council's Decision, Connecticut Archives, Ecclesiastical, I, Jan. 31, 1677.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Petition of Windsor Church to the General Court, n.d., (probably 1678), Connecticut Archives, Ecclesiastical, documents 66a-c.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Woodbridge sued for redress and the Court eventually awarded him the compensation of a 290 acre farm which was, of course, wilderness. I do not know what became of Chauncey. See Connecticut Court Records, III, 82, for the record of the Woodbridge case.

[38] Samuel Mather to Increase Mather, Nov. 4, 1678, "Mather Papers," MHS, Collections, Fourth series, VIII, 381.

[39] John Whiting to Increase Mather, Feb. 27, 1678, Ibid., 464.

[40] Not surprisingly Increase referred to him as a Presbyterian; see Walker, Hartford, 218.

[41] Walker, Hartford, 217.

[42] Stiles, Windsor, 183-184. Mather's role in the affair is clarified in a letter he wrote to John Haynes regarding Foster. After advising Foster that Windsor might be too "congregational" he reported to Haynes on the question of Foster's Presbyterianism, recounting the following alleged conversation between himself and Foster. Mather asked Foster where he stood on Presbyterianism: "His answer was that he believed he knew the reason of my proposal, for (?) had acquainted him with what yourself had written to Mr. Oakes and me, and upon that account he was not so free to express himselfe; only said that he never upon any occasion declared against the way Congregational. To be sure he is as large respecting the subject of Baptisme as the Synod in 62." Mather concluded by saying that if Windsor

wanted to take Foster he would not discourage it. Increase to John Haynes, 1679, in Walker, Hartford, 215-216.

[43] Ibid., 217-218. Foster died a few months later in an epidemic.

[44] John Whiting to Increase Mather, Oct. 25, 1682, "Mather Papers," 466.

[45] Connecticut Court Records, III, 104; also see Stiles, Windsor, 188-189.

[46] Connecticut Court Records, III, 104.

[47] Windsor, Connecticut, Records of the First Congregational Church, Connecticut State Library, III, membership lists.

[48] Samuel Mather's untitled Ms. is in the Connecticut Historical Society. Ironically, it was Stoddard who was instrumental in placing Mather in his first charge, Deerfield, in 1673. On the other hand, recognizing what occurred in that community after 1673, perhaps this was Mather's way of getting even.

[49] South Windsor, Connecticut (formerly East Windsor). Records of the First Congregational Church, Connecticut State Library, I, "A History of the Church" (author unknown).

[50] See pp. 259-260.

[51] Farmington, Connecticut, Records of the First Church of Christ, Connecticut State Library, I, June 15, 1673.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid., Dec. 17, 1706.

[55] Middletown, Connecticut, Records of the First Congregational Church, Connecticut State Library, I, Dec. 30 and Jan. 17, 1668.

[56] Ibid., June 2, 1672.

[57] Lockwood, Westfield, 114-115.

[58] Norman Grabo, "Edward Taylor on the Lord's Supper." Boston Public Library Quarterly, XII (Jan., 1960), 35.

[59] Edward Taylor's Commonplace Book, Winter, 1690.

[60] Silas Blake, The Later History of the First Church of Christ, New London, Connecticut (New London, 1900), 29-35.

[61] Caulkins, New London, 380. Other churches, including Northampton after 1672, also admitted children of the church automatically upon reaching adulthood. It became fairly common.

[62] See pp. 24-25.

[63] Farmington, for example, initially refused its adoption and was still debating its merits as late as 1762.

[64] See Northampton Church Records, I, Jan. 29 and Feb. 16, 1668; Nov. 5, 1672; Dec. 9, 1714.

[65] Middletown Church Records, I, Feb. 25, 1671.

[66] Ibid., Jan. 26, 1672.

[67] Ibid., Nov. 4, 1668.

[68] Middletown Church Records, I.

[69] Woodbury, Connecticut, Records of the First Congregational Church, Connecticut State Library, I, May 4, 1670. The Stratford Second Church was the "Presbyterian" faction from First Church which withdrew after a long struggle over several issues, especially membership requirements. The new church organized around a covenant but required no "public profession" for admission. Also, any "professing" Christian was baptized after owning the covenant. This had also been a point of dispute with First Church.

[70] Ibid., July 11, 1708.

[71] The attempt was only partially successful for only about 30% of half-way members, men and women, ever entered full communion, yet this was a higher percentage than I've found in any other church.

[72] All of the churches studied took in a reasonably large number of new members per year but, since most were women, the number of male members declined noticeably. Not surprisingly, a quick check of some churches swept by "revivals" in the late 1720's and early 1730's reveals that the lists of new members were dominated by men.

[73] For example, in 1696 one finds the case of a man who became a half-way member in December, a full member in January. However, it is not difficult to find persons who were half-way members for as much as fifteen years before seeking full membership. This can be compared to Woodbury where, of those half-way members reaching full communion, women joined in from one to three years from the date of owning the covenant while men averaged ten years.

[74] The preceding analysis of practices in Hartford is based on membership data in volume X of the Hartford Church Records and from similar data contained in the Hartford Catalogue, XII-XX, 3-47.

[75] In 1708-1709 New London was exercised by a great disturbance in the church over who would sit where in the new meeting house. See Caulkins, New London, 379-380.

Conclusion

[1] Bumsted, "Revivalism and Separatism," William and Mary Quarterly, third series, XXIV, 588-590.

[2] This brief summary of the major arguments for the "new piety" is largely a summation of the arguments of Solomon Stoddard in A Guide to Christ (Boston, 1714). I have used an 1816 edition (published in Northampton) which also included three "evangelical" sermons by Stoddard not previously published and outlining his version of the new piety. Further evidence of Stoddard's evangelicalism and emphasis on the minister and the Word is to be found in The Presence of Christ with the Minister's of the Gospel (Boston, 1718), The Defects of Preachers Reproved (New London, 1724), and The Duty of Gospel Ministers to Preserve a People from Corruption (Boston, 1718). Stoddard's evangelicalism was matched by that of his colleague at Hatfield, William Williams, in a small book published in 1717 and entitled The Great Salvation Revealed and Offered in the Gospel. Like Stoddard, Williams based his treatise on Paul's letters, emphasized the role of minister and Gospel in conversion and issued a call for a ministerially-inspired "revival." Other examples of Williams' evangelical attitude can be found in A Painful Ministry... (Boston, 1717), The Great Duty of Minister (Boston, 1726), and The Honour of Christ... (Boston, 1728). In Connecticut one of the most ardent advocates of the new piety was Eliphalet Adams of New London. Adams' arguments closely paralleled those of Stoddard and Williams, exalting the power and authority of the minister because of his central position in the conversion process. Adams'

committment to Pauline theology was complete; his zeal for revival an obsession. See especially his A Sermon Preached at Windham (New London, 1721), The Work of Ministers Rightly to Divide the Word of Truth (New London, 1725), and Ministers Must Take Heed to Their Ministry to Fulfill It (New London, 1726). There were also other treatises on the new piety published during the same period by ministers of lesser note. Some of those were two by Jonathan Marsh of Windsor, An Essay to Prove the Thorough Reformation of a Sinning People is not to be Expected... (New London, 1721), and The Great Care and Concern of Men Under Gospel Light... (New London, 1721); also an ordination sermon by Isaac Chauncey of Hadley entitled The Faithful Evangelist or The True Shepherd (Boston, 1725), also Samuel Whitman's (Farmington) Practical Godliness the Way to Prosperity (New London, 1714); and John Woodward's (Norwich) Civil Rulers are God's Ministers, for the Peoples Good (Boston, 1712).

[3] The reference to the Hampshire County Weekly lecture is taken from Warham Williams' Journal, 1712, Massachusetts Historical Society. The Hartford County Weekly lecture is discussed in Walker, Hartford, 268-270; See also Lockwood, Westfield, 125.

[4] Eliphalet Adams, Sermon Preached at Windham, 1721, ii-iv.

Bibliographic Essay

For the scholar or layman interested in the ecclesiastical history of Connecticut and the Connecticut Valley in the seventeenth century, a search of secondary material is likely to be a frustrating experience. Despite the availability of church records and ample collections of public and private papers in such depositories as the Connecticut Historical Society and the Connecticut State Library the modern researcher has largely avoided the kind of careful analysis of intellectual currents and institutional growth lavished on the churches and ministers of neighboring Massachusetts. True, valuable insights into the story of the Connecticut Valley may be gained from the many Massachusetts-oriented intellectual portraits of New England Puritanism from Perry Miller's Orthodoxy in Massachusetts, 1630-1650 (Boston, 1933), through Norman Pettit's The Heart Prepared... (New Haven and London, 1966). Insights into town growth and the development of the church as an institution may be garnered and applied to the Valley through such scholarly vehicles as Sumner Powell's analysis of Sudbury, Massachusetts, in Puritan Village: The Formation of a Puritan Town (Middletown, Connecticut, 1963), and Darrett Rutman's analysis of early Boston in Winthrop's Boston: Portrait of a

Puritan Town (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1965). Nor ought the reader avoid such excellent portrayals of English Puritanism as William Haller's Rise of Puritanism (New York, 1938), Alan Simpson's Puritanism in Old and New England (Chicage, 1955), Charles H. and Katherine George's The Protestant Mind of the English Reformation, 1570-1640 (Princeton, New Jersey, 1961), and Geoffrey Nuttall's Visible Saints: The Congregational Way, 1640-1660 (London, 1957). But, for specific treatments of Connecticut and the Connecticut Valley the interested reader is forced to rely largely on a few scattered products of another age. Chief among these are M. Louise Greene's The Development of Religious Liberty in Connecticut (Boston, 1905), Joseph B. Felt's The Ecclesiastical History of New England, 2 vols. (Boston, 1855, 1862), which contain a great deal of material pertaining to the Valley, and Benjamin Trumbull's A Complete History of Connecticut Civil and Ecclesiastical..., 2 vols. (New London, 1898, second edition), The latter two works are as much primary as secondary sources since they are based on much evidence no longer available to the scholar.

But the interested reader or dedicated scholar need not give up in despair for, though secondary treatments are lacking, a rich vein of material awaits the researcher sufficiently motivated to invest large amounts of time and energy in a perusal of the most significant product of nineteenth century antiquarianism, the New England local history. Though varying markedly in quality of analysis and in scholarly apparatus the local histories of Valley towns and churches, written primarily between 1850 and 1900, provide much of the raw data for any attempt to reconstruct the history of the Valley in the colonial period. Even the best of them, however, must be used carefully for interpretation, where it existed, was often influenced by filial piety or by partisan local issues having their origins in the colonial era yet still very much alive in the nineteenth century. But, despite certain drawbacks, they are essential to modern research for two reasons. First, local historians like James Trumbull or Henry Stiles often had access to documents which have since either been destroyed or have simply disappeared and, hence, their accounts of many events and their descriptions of many ancient documents are akin to primary evidence. Second, many of those writers included in their works fragments or whole sections from old church and town records, letters, diaries, journals, commonplace books, and legal records, as well as statistics regarding births, deaths, population, land acquisition, emigration and immigration, church membership, and social and economic class structure based on church records, tax records, wills, deeds, and other types of public and private documents, many of which are also now missing. In one such history, for example, *The History of Northampton*, 2 vols. (Northampton, Massachusetts, 1898), the author, James Trumbull, included in his narrative of that community's growth large fragments of town records, and did so without comment. The early records of the town have since vanished but to the student interested in Northampton in its very early years (1654-1700) much can be learned simply by studying Trumbull's fragments.

Among the town and church histories utilized for this study several deserve particular mention. Trumbull's *History of Northampton* is invaluable because of its many excerpts of ancient records. Henry R. Stiles' *The History of Ancient Windsor* (New York, 1859), and Frances M. Caulkins' *History of New London* (New London, 1895) are the most scholarly of all the local histories, excelling in the lucidity and perceptiveness of their analysis and also containing long excerpts from local records. Bernard Steiner's *A History of the Plantation of Nenunkatuck and the Original Town of Guilford, Connecticut* (Baltimore, 1897), and Ralph Smith's *History of Guilford, Connecticut, from its First Settlement in 1639* (Albany, 1877) are uneven in quality but contain the only known accounts of the early years of that important community. Sherman W. Adams and Henry R. Stiles, *The History of Ancient Wethersfield*, 2 vols. (Wethersfield, 1904) is inferior to Stiles' portrayal of Windsor but contains much ecclesiastical material. The opposite is true of J. Hammond Trumbull's monumental Memorial History of Hartford County, 1633-1884, 2 vols. (Boston, 1886), which is short on ecclesiastical material but rich in needed supplementary data on early Hartford. Finally, among histories of particular churches, none reach the plateau of excellence and utility occupied by George L. Walker's History of the First Church in Hartford, 1633-1883 (Hartford, 1884), which skillfully blends the facts of Hartford First's development with a more than adequate narrative of Connecticut's ecclesiastical history in the seventeenth century. Of all the local historians Walker, Stiles, and Caulkins excelled in their grasp not only of the significance of local events but also in their general understanding of the history of New England. As a result, their analyses are of infinitely more value than those of any other students of Valley history except Benjamin Trumbull and Sylvester Judd of Hadley, Massachusetts. Judd deserves special mention, not only for his History of Hadley (Springfield, 1905), but also for the magnificent collection of copied records (54 vols.) he produced which are now the property of the Forbes Library, Northampton. The Judd Manuscript, while weak on ecclesiastical records and hence not utilized to any extent in this study, is a vast

collection of miscellaneous records relating to the history of the upper Valley in the colonial period. Judd spent the last twenty years of his life meticulously copying documents and his Manuscript is the point of departure for any study of colonial western Massachusetts.

But the essence of Connecticut's and the Connecticut Valley's ecclesiastical history remains buried in the colonial records. Chief among these records are the Connecticut colonial church records maintained in manuscript and on microfilm in the Connecticut State Library, Hartford. This magnificent collection has only recently come under the scholar's gaze. The complete or partial records of several hundred churches may be found in the Connecticut State Library and of these at least half are from the colonial period. However, as might be expected, records for the seventeenth century are rather scant. The library possesses full or partial records for approximately nineteen churches in that century although many do not begin until several decades after a church's formation. This is, however, still an excellent sample and may be augmented by fragments of Connecticut church records to be found in such publications as The New England Historical and Geneological Register and no longer in existence in manuscript form. The researcher interested in studying the church records will quickly note that their compilation tends to follow a pattern. Generally, separate volumes were maintained for baptism and membership lists, cases of discipline, and records of meetings of the membership. Also, the researcher will occasionally find that a minister kept the records in the form of a personal journal (Stephen Mix of Wethersfield, for example). Needless to say, no study of Connecticut "Puritanism" can be written without a thorough knowledge and understanding of these records.

Understanding the ministerial "mind" of Connecticut and the Connecticut Valley in the seventeenth century is not an easy task. Connecticut had no printing press until the early years of the eighteenth century, and ministers bent on publishing their views had to utilize distant presses in Boston, New York, or, occasionally, London. Also, there are no large manuscript collections pertaining to particular Valley ministers and finding the requisite letters, diaries, etc., needed for an intellectual and institutional portrait of the collective ministry requires a great deal of time spent perusing unlikely collections. The author did, however, find several valuable documents buried in the Miscellaneous Bound Manuscripts of the Massachusetts Historical Society and made similar findings in the miscellaneous collections of the Connecticut State Library and the Connecticut Historical Society. Another significant collection of documents pertaining to Valley clergy is to be found in the Gratz Collection, Pennsylvania Historical Society, Philadelphia, under the heading "American Colonial Clergy." Also helpful, especially for the early eighteenth century, are the Curwin Papers in the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts. This collection contains many letters to and from Benjamin Colman in addition to letters to and from various ministers in the Connecticut Valley of western Massachusetts.

However, much can be ascertained about the thoughts and actions of the Valley clergy through local histories and printed documents. Of the latter several deserve special mention. The Massachusetts Historical Society's Collections are standard for any study of New England. Particularly helpful for the Valley ministry are the "Winthrop Papers" (especially series 4, vols. 6 and 7) and the "Mather Papers" (series 4, vol. 8). The Collections of the Connecticut Historical Society are equally useful and the interested student is directed, especially, to the "Wyllys Papers" (vol. 21) and the "Hoadly Memorial" (vol. 24). Much documentary material may also be found in Trumbull's History of Connecticut and Felt's Ecclesiastical History of New England. Finally, the reader is directed to the published writings of the ministers themselves. The author has used James Hammond Trumbull's List of Books Printed in Connecticut, 1709-1800 (n.p., 1904) supplemented by Charles Evans'

American Bibliography, 14 vols. (Chicago, 1903-1959), and a fairly exhaustive search of the excellent pamphlet collection of the Connecticut Historical Society and has isolated approximately one-hundred titles by Valley ministers between 1670 and 1730 (almost nothing was published by Valley clergy before 1670). Of these, most are to be found among the American Antiquarian Society's microcard reproductions of the titles on Evans' list. Many of the titles not found in Evans may be found in the Connecticut Historical Society.

For the story of the Valley brethren the reader is directed to the town histories and the manuscript church records. For the early chapters on the churches the author was forced to rely heavily on the local histories and published records. Of the latter, special mention must be made of the lengthy "Records of the Hartford Controversy" contained in volume II of the Collections of the Connecticut Historical Society. For the later chapters the author relied almost entirely on the church records supplemented by such printed records as the Historical Catalogue of the First Church in Hartford, 1633-1885 (Hartford, 1885), the Connecticut Historical Society's Some Early Records and Documents Relating to the Town of Windsor, Connecticut, 1639-1703 (Hartford, 1930), and the Records of the Congregational Church in Suffield, Connecticut, 1710-1836 (Hartford, 1941).

Finally, much of the story of the ecclesiastical development of the Connecticut Valley is to be found in the public records of both Connecticut and Massachusetts. The Ecclesiastical Manuscripts in the Massachusetts Archives, Boston, are very helpful for western Massachusetts and are available to the distant scholar on microfilm. The Ecclesiastical Manuscripts in the Connecticut Archives are a prerequisite for a study of this type and are made doubly useful by the incredibly detailed index compiled by Hadley's Sylvester Judd. Also valuable are The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut, 1636-1776, vols. 1-3, ed. by J. H. Trumbull; vols. 4-17 ed. by C. J. Hoadly (15 vols., Hartford, 1850-1890).